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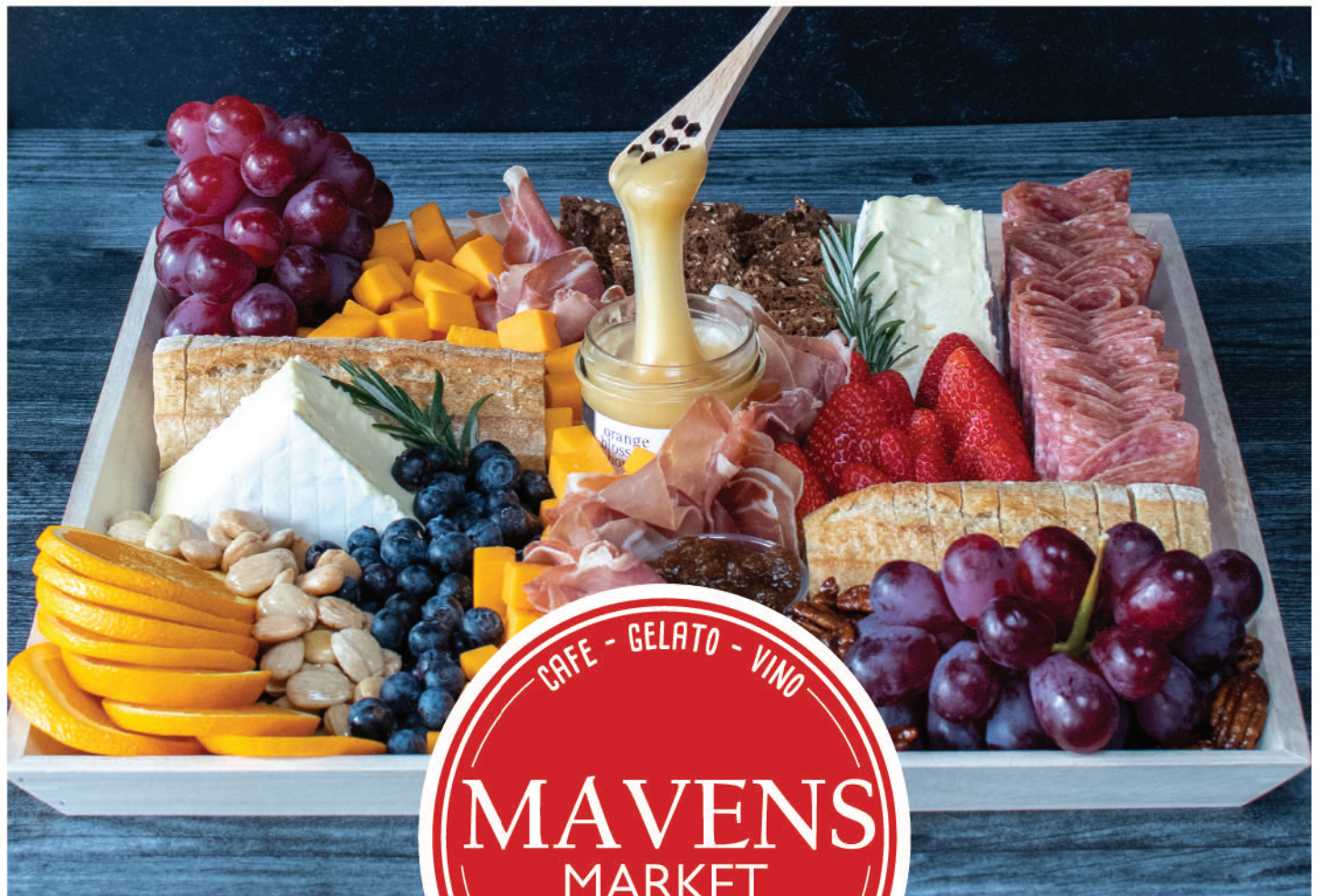
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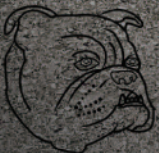
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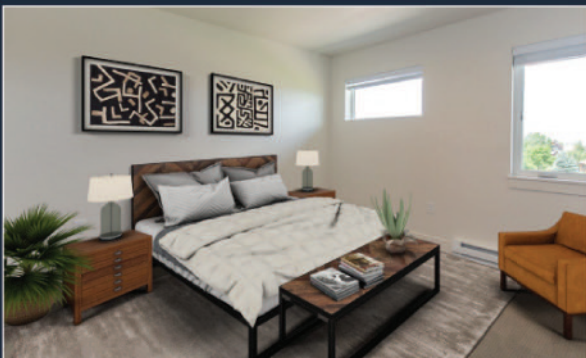


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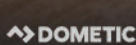
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From The Editor

What a year we've had, Bobcats! While the MSU football team had another stellar season, our basketball team was over the moon. Even with the loss of coach Sprinkle and some key players, new head basketball coach Matt Logie brought a team together to beat the odds, pulling off the first Big Sky Tournament three-peat since 1980. His article describing his tumultuous first-year-at-the-helm experience is a must-read.

As usual, Paul Burns' profiles are top-notch. His interviews with current athletes in numerous sports include Marcus Wehr, Rylan Ort, Brian Goracke, Julius Davis, and Brendan Hall. All are informative and inspiring—and his talk with the legendary Jody Owens offers insight into just how far we've come.

Be sure to get the skinny on women's basketball standout, Katelyn Limardo. The slender, soft-spoken senior's comeback from a serious injury that could have left her on the sidelines all season is an awe-inspiring story.

Former defensive lineman Ben Seymour shares what football has meant to him from a professional perspective, and we chat with West Wilson, an MSU grad who is fast becoming a sports reporting star alongside reality TV fame for his participation in *Summer House*. The Chute Boss Club and Sideline Engineers are crucial to Bobcat success on the field and off; we give you an inside glimpse into their duties and devotion. We sit down with businessman Dan Rust, as well as delve into the duties of MSU Athletic Communications Director Tom Schulz (ask him about skiing down Bridger Bowl with a fax machine sometime!).

Speaking of snowy showmanship, we're sure you'll enjoy reading about MSU grad / retired UPS driver John Nelson's harrowing drive through a blizzard to Brookings, SD for the Bobcat / Jackrabbit contest. He and his brother Greg had quite the adventure!

Professional photographer and BFM+ Publisher Felix Marquez once again delivers outstanding action photos depicting the drama and intensity of competition 'up close and personal.' With a new indoor training center in the works, student-athletes (especially those on the football and track & field teams) will be able to up their games. Can't wait to see what the upcoming sports year brings.

Keep It Up, 'Cats

Cynthia Logan

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INDOOR TRAINING BREAKS GROUND



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"I appreciate the university's commitment to providing our student-athletes with the resources to compete for championships at the national and conference levels." ~ Lyle Weese

Montana State University Director of Athletics Leon Costello announced Bobcat Athletics' latest capital improvement this summer, an indoor facility providing space for football and track and field practices, track and field meets, and other community events.

"I want to thank President Waded Cruzado, the entire MSU administration, and our donors for making this game-changing

facility a reality," says MSU Director of Athletics Leon Costello. "The Indoor Athletic Center is another priority accomplished in our Strategic and Facility Masterplans, and will offer Bobcat student athletes the space needed to prepare safely for competition regardless of weather conditions."

According to Costello, the project is one hundred percent donor financed, was designed by 45 Architecture & Interiors, and

will be constructed by Langlas & Associates, general contractor, and managed by MSU Planning, Design and Construction. "The Indoor Athletic Center offers our football team a venue to practice that avoids frigid late-season and spring temperatures, and offers our track and field athletes consistent training and competition opportunities throughout the academic year," says Costello. "It will also maximize training days to continue the development

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Exterior rendering of MSU Indoor Athletic Center

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of all student-athletes and programs that use the facility, and will decrease the risk of student-athlete injuries by limiting time spent practicing in inclement conditions."

The Bobcat IAC will contain 100 yards of turf encompassed by a six-lane 300-meter oval track. The north end of the facility features the building's main entrance, a meeting room and restrooms. Inside the pre-engineered metal building supported by steel beams, a full drop curtain surrounding the football turf allows for a safe environment for multiple simultaneous sporting activities.

The FieldTurf football surface provides an 80-yard playing field and two 10-yard end zones. For nearly a decade the Bobcat football team's in-season practices occur in the early-morning, and MSU football coach Brent Vigen says that eliminating brutal weather conditions enhances the squad's

preparation and safety.

"This facility will have a profound impact on our program all year round," states Vigen. "Whether it's a practice during the season or a workout in the off-season, our players will benefit greatly and will be able to improve their game, while reducing the risk of unnecessary injury. I appreciate our university and athletic administrations for initiating this project, and our donors for making it a reality."

The track oval will be a full-pour polyurethane surface composed of BSS 1000 encapsulated

texture surface, the same as the program's outdoor track, and will be installed by the Beynon Sports track surfacing company. The facility features two competition throwing rings, an approach apron for the high jump, and runways and pits for the pole vault, long jump, and triple jump. The IAC location displaces the current outdoor track hammer and discus throwing area, which will be relocated south of the outdoor track. A walkway connecting the current seating area to the new outdoor throwing areas will be constructed.

"I appreciate the university's commitment to providing our student-athletes with the resources to compete for championships at the national and conference levels," says Lyle Weese, MSU's Dale Kennedy Director of Track and Field. "I experienced those opportunities as both an athlete and as a coach, and I look forward to current and future Bobcats reaching new heights."

Located west of MSU's outdoor track with a northwest-to-southeast orientation, the facility will be available to Bobcat varsity student-athletes during daytime hours, and to community sports groups during specified evening and weekend hours. The Bobcat Plaza, currently located at the northeast corner of the outdoor track, will be relocated near the IAC.





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members and leaders that help make life eventful and fun. The Fall Festival is one of the largest and longest running events in Belgrade. Put on by the Chamber of Commerce and



supported by community partners, this event was started 61 years ago to celebrate the harvest of crops in the fall as well as the Belgrade School District Homecoming. Everyone is welcome to come celebrate our thriving agriculture community with a parade, 5K fun run, community BBQ, Car Show, over 80 Arts and Craft vendors, kids' activities and music! This years Festival is on September 28th at Lions Park in Belgrade. The Belgrade Community Coalition hosts Belgrade Summer Nights, a live music series with food, drinks, treats and dancing downtown Belgrade as well as MANY other events throughout the year. Our community is

very fortunate to have this fun, hard working group to spearhead amazing community improvements as well as host out of this world events. The Montana Convoy Foundation heads up the annual Christmas Convoy that rolls 100 + fabulously decorated trucks though Belgrade every year to help kick off the Christmas season. This year's event will be December 6th and 7th. Among it's events Belgrade is known for its small-town charm and welcoming community. These residents are hardworking, friendly people who take great pride in a place they call home. Come visit us in Belgrade!

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THE CURRENT STATE OF NIL

BY JOSH MOODY OF *INSIDE HIGHER ED*

NCAA Division I athletes reportedly earned an average of \$3,711 in the first year of NIL

Louisiana State University gymnast Olivia Dunne has leveraged a strong social media presence to bring in lucrative name, image and likeness deals. It's been two years since the National Collegiate Athletic Association established policies allowing college athletes to profit off of their name, image and likeness.

The NCAA had argued for years that allowing athletes the same rights as every other student would ruin collegiate sports. Critics feared NIL would usher in a pay-to-play era, and many decried the early NIL landscape as a Wild West of unlimited possibilities—and hidden dangers.

Big-dollar deals made headlines

early on. Former University of Alabama quarterback Bryce Young cashed in on deals with national corporations like Subway and Cash App, and local companies, too, such as a BMW dealership in Tuscaloosa. Dunne channeled millions of social media followers into agreements with companies such as American Eagle and GrubHub, among

other sponsorships. College athletes collectively made an estimated \$917 million from NIL payments in the first year, with the most lucrative deals flowing to football and men’s basketball stars. NCAA Division I athletes reportedly earned an average of \$3,711 in the first year of NIL.

While the long-feared death of college sports hasn’t occurred, critics and supporters alike see problems on the horizon, particularly with a patchwork of state laws that provide more financial freedom for college athletes in some states than others. Now, two years into the NIL reality, heavy hitters in the college sports world are descending on Washington to push Congress to provide guidelines to keep NIL from becoming an arms race that will empower top athletic programs and conferences while leaving others behind. A recent NIL Summit also explored potential changes on the horizon.

The Need for Regulation

Officials from the Southeastern Conference (SEC) met with lawmakers in Washington, looking for federal regulations on NIL. The group included conference officials, college presidents, athletic directors and legendary Alabama football coach, Nick Saban.

While various state laws exist, there has been little movement on an NIL bill at the national level. And after years of resisting NIL, even the NCAA hopes to see federal guidance on the matter. When the association hired former Massachusetts governor Charlie Baker as its new president late last year, it was widely believed that Baker was brought on board to flex some political muscle on behalf of the NCAA and help get legislation governing

NIL passed at the national level.

Indeed, Baker has called for congressional action on NIL, arguing in a recent X (Twitter) thread that differing state laws create an uneven playing field.

“NIL is a powerful vehicle that rightfully allows student-athletes the ability to earn compensation from their unique market value. At the same time, the lack of transparency in today’s NIL marketplace puts student-athletes in jeopardy of exploitation by bad actors,” wrote Baker.

For the highly competitive SEC conference—which spans 11 states and has produced the

last four national champions in football—the matter is of vital importance as states try to outmaneuver one another on NIL laws. Some states have created more restrictive environments, putting their athletic programs at a recruitment disadvantage compared to others operating with fewer NIL rules.

At the federal level, Democratic senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Republican senator Tommy Tuberville—who made a career in college football, including as head coach at Auburn University—have signaled interest in crafting a bipartisan bill to regulate NIL across the U.S. However, their efforts have yet to materialize into a Senate bill.

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Other lawmakers have introduced legislation, including the Student Athlete Level Playing Field Act and the Fairness Accountability and Integrity in Representation of College Sports Act, in the House, and the Athlete Opportunity and Taxpayer Integrity Act in the Senate. But despite such proposals, some experts are skeptical that federal action on NIL will happen anytime soon. Max Forer, a partner in the Miller Nash law firm, told Inside Higher Ed that while “the devil is in the details,” comprehensive legislation governing NIL would have to consider how colleges navigate Title IX, oversee requirements for NIL deals and the classification of NCAA athletes as employees, and weigh an antitrust exemption for the NCAA, among other issues.

Mit Winter, a collegiate sports attorney at Kennyhertz Perry, offers a similar perspective. “I am not optimistic that the federal bill is going to be passed this year,” Winter said, adding that such legislation isn’t a high enough priority for lawmakers to surpass other national issues.

Changing State Laws

To remedy the competitive imbalance that has emerged, some state lawmakers have revisited legislation passed in the early days of NIL, modifying or repealing laws to lift certain

prohibitions. Seeking to be proactive, some states passed NIL laws even before the NCAA created a bare-bones policy. In many cases, that means lawmakers initially restricted activity that the NCAA ultimately allowed later on, giving athletes in states without legislation more flexibility to make deals.

“When it all started, it was a slow trickle—everyone was pretty risk averse. But now more institutions and state legislatures are becoming more aggressive with their approach,” Forer said. “It’s almost akin to the facility arms race, where you want the best locker rooms or best treatment centers—now you want the best and most protective state bill.”

So far, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina have repealed NIL legislation passed previously. Other states—such as Arkansas, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, Pennsylvania and Tennessee—have amended state laws governing NIL. A common theme in such amendments has been creating a legal environment more favorable to NIL deals.

In fact, Winter noted, some state laws have added permissions that are not included in the NCAA’s rules governing NIL. But—just as the association did when state NIL legislation began

taking off—Winter expects the NCAA to hang back and press for federal regulations rather than waging a legal battle against multiple states that are pushing the envelope on NIL deals.

The Rise of NIL Collectives

Following the introduction of NIL rights, collectives began to emerge and quickly spread. NIL collectives, as defined by the IRS, are “structurally independent of a school, yet fund NIL opportunities for the school’s student-athletes.” Essentially, such collectives raise funds “to create opportunities for student-athletes to leverage their NIL in exchange for compensation.”

It’s increasingly uncommon for a top athletic program to not have an affiliated NIL collective, which often helps athletes negotiate contracts and partnerships, and develop marketing strategies; collectives also provide guidance on NCAA compliance while enabling athletes to cash in on their talents. In a sense, collectives—often established and operated by fans or boosters—provide a centralized entity to help athletes handle business matters, though how such organizations are structured may vary.

Collectives have become controversial since their

inception. As NIL deal brokers, collectives have been accused of stealing recruits from colleges with promises of greater payouts, raising concerns about the influence of money on college athletics. The general lack of oversight of collectives has also drawn scrutiny.

The Future of College Sports

In the absence of federal legislation, institutions face an unclear future on NIL matters. But the introduction of NIL may only be the first domino to fall in a possible shake-up of college sports that could drive a sea change, leading to new challenges for colleges and new rights for athletes.

Johnson v. NCAA, a lawsuit currently winding through

the courts, may ultimately decide whether college athletes should be considered employees under the Fair Labor Standards Act. While plaintiffs have argued that they should be considered employees, the NCAA contends that Department of Labor guidelines prohibit college athletes from being considered as such.

The National Labor Relations Board has also argued that college athletes should be considered employees in a complaint filed against the NCAA, the University of Southern California and the Pac-12 Conference. A hearing on the NLRB complaint is scheduled for November, and a decision against the NCAA could result in the classification of athletes as employees and open the

door to unionization, radically altering the landscape of college sports in the years to come.

Forer argues there is a “clear and realistic possibility” that college athletes may be found to be wrongly classified and will be considered employees. That may then open the door to unionization, with sports teams possibly split into individual bargaining units. Suddenly an institution with 20 sports teams, for example, may find itself at the negotiating table with representatives from each athletic squad. He asks; “Can you actually imagine having 20 different representatives from different teams at your institution negotiating with your institution on different collective bargaining agreements?”



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Sideline Field Engineers

BY DAVE JOHNSON AND GARY KIMMET

“Working alongside and seeing what the Referees see, close up and in real time, creates a whole new appreciation for what they do.”



Who the heck are the Bobcat Sideline Field Engineers? You've seen them if you attend Bobcat Football games but probably didn't pay much attention to them, especially if they're doing their job like they should.

This is the team that handles the balls, chains, and markers, and keeps penalty statistics for the Game Officials on the sidelines of the field during Bobcat Football home games — hence the team's name. "Engineers" was

added, perhaps humorously, giving homage to one of MSU's largest colleges. They are referred to as SFEs for short.

The current SFE team was started during the Mike Kramer coaching era, when there was a need for a more consistent and experienced crew to replace the "ball boys" who were randomly assigned duties for each game. Now retired, Assistant Athletic Director Dan Davies contacted long-time Bobcat supporter Dick Harte (founder and a former owner of Universal Athletic) to put together a team that would show up for every game. Today, Dick is the "Boss" SFE. A team member helped organize a consistent crew comprised of relatives and close friends who had Bobcat connections.

Before and during the earlier part of the Rob Ash coaching era, Chain Crew duties were performed by the young men and ladies from the MSU Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC). The inconsistencies from not using the same experienced personnel for all games created a need to organize the Chain Crew, thus giving birth to the Sideline Field Engineers. Later, at the request of some of the Big Sky Officials/Referees, an Auxiliary Marker Crew and a Penalty/Stats Recorder were added to the team.

Today, the Sideline Field Engineers' team includes four different crews, with a total of up to twenty members for each game. The Ball Crew includes two Ball Boys and two Ball Chasers on each side of the field, and two Ball Runners to shuttle balls between the two sidelines. A big part of the Ball Crew's job is to ensure the Referees have the right balls in play, as the 'Cats and the visiting team each use their own balls when on offense. Only

approved balls that are checked and marked by the officials before and at halftime may be used during games (no, we will never have any "deflategate" issues at our stadium).

The Chain Crew of five people works on the Bobcat side of the field, and manages the 10-yard chain and markers for official first down measurements, the down box on the line of scrimmage (showing what down it is for every play), clips to mark the chain's position on the field, and an orange arrow marker set on the line-to-gain, which aids players and Referees in seeing where a first down would be in the hectic action of sideline plays.

The Auxiliary Marker Crew of four works on the visitors' side of the field and manages an auxiliary down box on the line of scrimmage, a Spotter to mark the down box spot, an auxiliary line-to-gain stick, and an orange arrow marker at the line-to-gain. The last member of this crew may work on either sideline to record stats and penalties for the Referees, which are reviewed at halftime and after the game.

All Sideline Field Engineers are volunteers and are not employed by MSU or the Big Sky Conference, but do liaise with Andrew Shepardson, MSU Assistant Athletics Director for Facilities, Game Operations and Events. They are, however, representatives of MSU and the Bobcats and, as such, are expected to conduct themselves professionally without "unfavorable interactions" with the Referees, players, coaches, or crowd. They are not allowed to imbibe alcoholic beverages (so much for tailgating) before the game, as they are essentially a part of the Big Sky Officials' Crew.

Though most SFEs are already season ticketholders, they do get free “worker” access to the games.

The SFE team is a diverse group of people with different backgrounds from scattered locations, mostly around Montana. They are of all ages and work status, and have different connections to MSU. Many of the core team are long-term members, and have multiple family members regularly involved. Friends and acquaintances make up the balance of the team. Other relatives and friends sporadically fill in when there are vacancies.

Team members have come from several areas throughout Montana to faithfully work at every home football game, including Bigfork, Billings, Bozeman, Columbia Falls, Fort Benton, Hardin, Helena, Kalispell, Gilford, Laurel, Libby, Roberts, Shelby, Stevensville, Sunburst, Terry, and Whitefish. Members also come up from Colorado, and a few make the trip up from as far away as Arizona.

Job backgrounds for the group range from active to retired status within varied occupations. SFEs include Montana school administrators, teachers, coaches, and personnel in maintenance and educational support organizations. Some are military personnel, medical personnel (including an optometrist, an occupational therapist, and an anesthesiologist), financial professionals, and attorneys. Others are farmers and ranchers, owners, executives, managers, technicians, designers, and employees in various large and small businesses and organizations.

The group’s connections to MSU are also varied, but all are strong

Bobcats. Most are MSU Alumni. Three members (Dan Hodge, Kip Gjerde, and Gary Kimmet) played for the Bobcats in the 1960’s and 70’s under former head coaches Jim Sweeney, Tom Parac, and Sonny Holland. Some who are not Alumni grew up in Bobcat families and became Bobcats. Some married into Bobcat families. Several are Bobcat Club and Bobcat Quarterback Club members, and good supporters of Bobcat Athletics.

Elderly is a good descriptor for many on the team, and some are not quite as swift as they once were, so the younger folks take on some of the running jobs. Former Coach Jeff Choate would sometimes refer to the group as the “geriatric crew,” but the action in the games was never held up or delayed by the SFEs.

Each SFE crew meets with different Referees before the game. Universally, the Referees’ first instructions are always “to be safe and not get hurt.” It’s usually crowded on the sidelines, and the action can be fast and dangerous as players tackle and block each other off the field. Members note that the difference between being on the sidelines or in the stands is the speed of play and the noise, both on the field and from the stands. Almost every member of the team has been run into by players, or worse. One SFE took a significant hit to his forehead and had to go the locker room for stitches. Being Bobcat tough, he returned and finished the game. Other SFEs have had to back up to avoid hits, and tripped on objects outside the sidelines that resulted in getting caught in the practice kicking nets or other hazards with players on top of them. Last fall, an incident occurred during a kick-off return where several SFE members were knocked or pulled

to the ground near the backwall, trying to get out of the line of fire. One time, a player came flying off the field and hit an SFE in the face with his helmet, splitting his lip. He caught and held the SFE, so he didn’t fall, asked him if he was okay, and ran back into action when he heard, “yes.”

Every member of the SFE team would agree that it’s a privilege and an honor to represent MSU on the Bobcat football field sidelines, and to enjoy the different experiences that come with each game. Though they may come from different families, backgrounds, or localities, they often have stated that they feel like one big family when gathering before and during the games.

They get to watch the interactions between game officials, players, and coaches. Working alongside and seeing what the Referees see, close up and in real time, creates a whole new appreciation for what they do. The SFE crews understand that the Big Sky Officials use different mechanics and positioning of their game officials to improve the flow of the game. The respect given to the officiating crew by the SFEs seems to be mutual, as the Referees have consistently commented on how much they appreciate the conduct and the workmanship of MSU’s sideline crews.

SFEs observe, close-up, the differences in demeanor, discipline, and organization of the coaches on both sidelines and how they interact with each other, the officiating crew, and their players. In most cases, players seem to exhibit the same character and personality as the Head Coach. That is one reason the Bobcat Football program is in such good hands under the direction of Coach Brett Vigen.



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RODEO'S QB:

THE CHUTE BOSS

BY VANESSA MCMURRAY

We want Montana State to be the Alabama of college rodeo. ~ Mike Hope



seamlessly. He is the Quarterback of the Rodeo. The Chute Boss Club garnered its name from this rodeo character because members see themselves as embodying that guy, doing what it takes to make MSU rodeo successful.

At Montana State, the connection between rodeo and football is tangible every Saturday afternoon in the fall, when the rodeo team leads the football team onto the field. The Runout never fails to send chills through the fans, who suddenly feel their Montana heritage bubble to the surface as they watch cowgirls and cowboys on horseback lead the charge. It's no surprise that behind this display of choreographed western bravado is, among others, the Chute Boss Club, a group of individuals who have made Montana State Rodeo their mission. "We want Montana State to be the Alabama of college rodeo," member Mike Hope is reported to have stated. If you know college football, that is a big mission, but not impossible for college rodeo fans in Bozeman, Montana.

The Chute Boss Club, which was started in 2002, began with about 30 members. Local past rodeo athlete and businessman, Dean Folkvord says the Club was founded with the objective of being able to enhance the Rodeo Program at Montana State. The group presently boasts a membership of two hundred, forty of whom are Gold Buckle members,

The Chute Boss is the unsung hero of the rodeo. He is behind the gates making sure that unruly stock load, and

that riders are secure when the chute swings open. Sometimes, he must make a quick decision to change up the order of contestants to keep the rodeo running

contributing \$2500.00 yearly, while the others pay \$1000.00 to support the team. Folkvord envisions that the Chute Boss Club will be able to underwrite the MSU Rodeo Team in the same way the Quarterback Club provides support for the MSU Football program.

The money the Chute Boss Club garners goes toward scholarships, housing stipends, and arena success, and allows Coach Kyle Whitaker to have additional funds for recruitment and other needs the Rodeo Team may have. This group contributes over \$300,000 annually to the rodeo program. When a student finds out there may be help with funding their housing in Bozeman, it is a great incentive to be a part of the Montana State community. Board members for the Chute Boss Club are: Dean Folkvord, President,



Tom Holland, Shawn Koenig, Mark Norem, Butch Bratsky, Austin Mark, Scott LeProwse, Mike Hope and Lynn Perkins. Dave Jarrett is membership chairman. You would be hard pressed to find bigger hearts for Rodeo and student athletes than these individuals exhibit in their commitment to

providing funds for MSU Rodeo.

The results of the support the Club has on MSU Rodeo are not hard to discern. Since 2002, Montana State University has had seven National Championship teams, and eight Individual National Championships. In this year's

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Spring Rodeo (April 2024), Montana State won the men's and women's team titles in both sessions.

Prior to 2022, MSU leased practice facilities and boarding space for the team's animals. When the MSU Alumni Foundation began looking for a permanent home for Montana State Rodeo, the Chute Boss Club got behind the idea and members contributed to make it a reality. The Stock Family MSU Rodeo Facility, north of Belgrade, cuts down on the costs athletes incur to practice and board their animals. It saves rodeo athletes haul time, and allows them to saddle up and practice in a more time-efficient manner, affording them more class and study time. The results don't end there.

Imagine your child wants to attend Montana State University and wants to rodeo. The housing crisis in Bozeman can be daunting. The Chute Boss Club awards the top 20 athletes a \$500.00 per month stipend they can use toward housing. This, in conjunction with

the benefit of boarding at the Stock Family MSU Facility, becomes a talking point for recruitment. The Chute Boss Club contends this allows MSU to compete for the best college athletes in the country who want to be part of a first-class college rodeo program.

The Chute Boss Club encourages and celebrates the symbiotic relationship between rodeo and football at Montana State University. The Montana State football team does a Runout at the Spring Rodeo that is equally as popular as the one the Rodeo Team performs for Bobcat football home games in the fall. Football teammates carry flags spelling "B-o-b-c-a-t-s" ahead of the MSU rodeo team, which has created a bond between athletes from both sports. The short lap the football players run brings rodeo spectators to their feet as they celebrate the camaraderie of programs at Montana State.

What does Montana State football coach Kyle Whitaker think about

the crew behind the Chute? What benefit is this group to his program? "The Chute Boss Club helps a ton!" The enthusiasm in Coach Whitaker's voice is evident as he adds; "The stipend for housing is a big factor for kids in Bozeman. Pretty much anything we go to them (the Chute Boss Club) with, they are easy to work with. We tell the kids to thank them and talk to them any chance they get. We (Coach Whitaker and Coach Savanna Meyer) can go to the Chute Boss Club meetings and take them any goal or concern we have."

"It just makes sense that Montana State, the State Land Grant college, should have a strong rodeo program," says Chute Boss President, Dean Folkvord. "President Cruzado certainly understands this, and has been an incredible advocate for the success of rodeo at MSU. Alongside that, the western life and rodeo are a big part of the culture of this great State. All of these things fit together like a glove. The rodeo program here provides a tremendous opportunity for rural kids to get a world-class education at a four-year college, and still participate in the sport of rodeo," he summates. That is the passion for rodeo behind the Chute Boss Club.

To quote some well-known lyrics... "It's boots and chaps, it's cowboy hats, it's spurs and latigo, it's ropes and reins and the joy and the pain... and they call the thing rodeo."

Behind Montana State Rodeo is the Chute Boss Club. Their intentions are to make sure that when the rodeo starts, the cowboy/girl comes out of the chute with every opportunity to win. It takes commitment to become the "Alabama of college rodeo."

"It just makes sense that Montana State, the State Land Grant college, should have a strong rodeo program"



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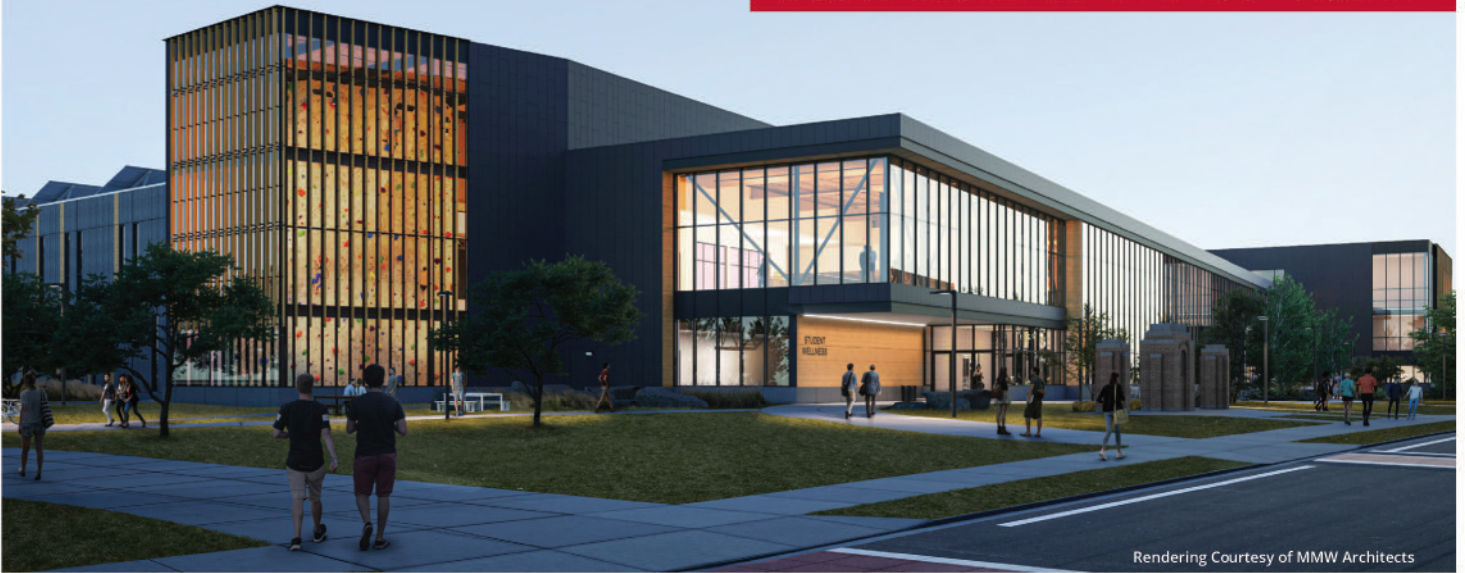
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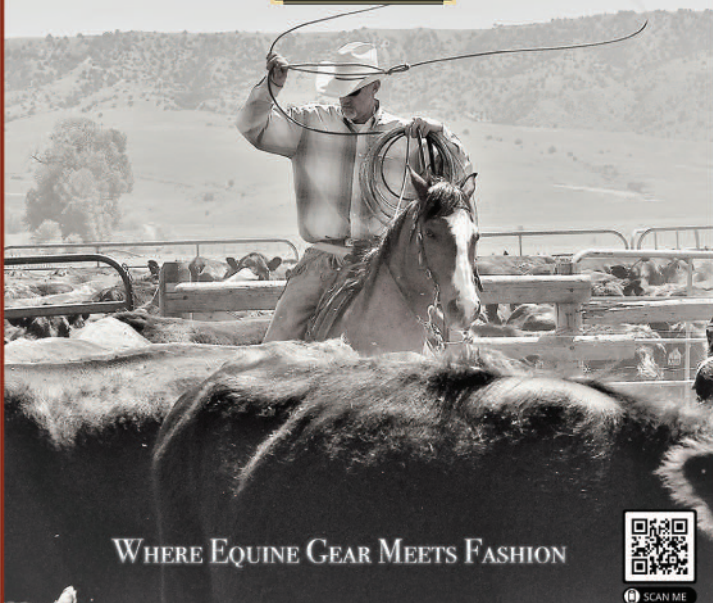


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COMMUNICATING WITH

TOM SCHULZ



“Many Schools Looked To Montana State For A Template On How To Do Women’s Athletics.”

BY CYNTHIA LOGAN

MSU’s Athletic Communications Director Tom Schulz has never tailgated. Though he’s been with the University for 36 years, he’s always up in the press box while his wife, Pam, and their three kids enjoy mixing it up with friends and fans at football games. On the Athletic Media

Relations staff since fall of 1988, Schulz is the guy you call for information on Bobcat volleyball, skiing, women’s basketball and women’s tennis teams.

“Every week during volleyball or basketball, you’re putting up 28 pages,” says Schulz of his job. “You’re an information machine, churnin’ it out... you’ll

get a writer asking when the last time so-and-so scored 42 points, so you’re also a historian, as well as a marketer. We send a preview and recap to every media outlet that wants to receive it, as well as post on numerous social accounts. It’s always changing and evolving—definitely not monotonous, because each sporting event

has a different story.”

Growing up in Anoka, Minnesota near the Twin Cities, Schulz played ice hockey until the ninth grade, and for college chose Bemidji State University partly because they had a great hockey program. The school also had a good journalism and communications department, and parking wasn't a problem. “The Student Union looked out on Lake Bemidji, which would freeze so solidly you could park on it,” recalls Schulz, who graduated in 1985 with a bachelor's degree in mass communication, with an emphasis in journalism and broadcast media. Schulz had been the sports editor of *The Northern Student* at Bemidji State. “Back then, we didn't have laptops. You had to typeset; you'd take the cannister downstairs to the basement to be developed, then wax the back of it and stick it onto the paper for the layout,” he reports.

Schulz honed his writing chops at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, where he read sportswriters like Sid Hartman and Patrick Reusse in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*. “My mentor, Anne Abicht took me into the sports info office, where I learned the ropes,” he says. “Herb Brooks was the head hockey coach, and the Huskies were making the transition to NCAA Division I. I was starstruck; he had a big media following, so this was not putting your toe in the water, it was getting dunked all the way. It was tough, but cool.”

When he started at MSU, Schulz was the Women's Sports Information Director, covering publicity and marketing for MSU women's athletics (which at the time was among a handful of separate departments at the NCAA Division I level, under the

direction of women's athletics pioneer, Dr. Ginny Hunt). In July 1993, that department merged with men's athletics. “The positive result was that there were more resources,” says Schulz, “though to carve your niche in women's sports at that time was challenging.” He mentions that MSU was at the forefront of Title IX. “Many schools looked to Montana State for a template on how to do women's athletics.”

Good thing Schulz had developed some serious skiing skills in Minnesota. In 1996, while covering an MSU event from Bridger Bowl, he had to ski down

“What helps me is that, as a sports info person, I know the kids; I know their numbers. So it's a matter of telling the story of the game.”

from Deer Park Chalet with what was basically the predecessor of a fax machine. He'd managed to catch the chairlift holding the thing, wearing a backpack stuffed with a typewriter and three reams of paper. Once up the hill, he used AOL to dial up and log in. After the broadcast, he skied down cradling the machine, the backpack balancing some of the load, ski poles tucked under his arms.

Over his three-plus decades at MSU, Schulz has been the host media coordinator for five NCAA Division I Skiing Championships, and has worked three NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament First and Second Rounds, two NCAA Women's Basketball Regionals, and two NCAA Track and Field Championships. He has served on the CoSIDA Ethics, Academic All-America and

Publications Committees, and was press conference moderator for the 2002 NCAA Women's Basketball West Regional in Boise.

Though not a formal part of his job description, Schulz has also been tasked with play-by-play responsibilities. “Back in 1992 or '93, KBMN-AM, a radio studio on North 7th Avenue, broadcast some women's basketball games, he recalls. “You had to call in using a rotary phone.” He called, relating some MSU action as it happened, repeating the feat in 2022, when WBB announcer Mark Martello was let go after making inappropriate remarks about an opposing team.

How does he keep up the banter? “What helps me is that, as a sports info person, I know the kids; I know their numbers. So it's a matter of telling the story of the game. You do your homework, have the information in front of you. It's not my first thing to do, not a love. It was fun and all, but doing that and your regular day job is a lot.”

Professional employees at MSU are on a one-year contract, and Schulz' has been renewed 36 times—clearly a mutually satisfying situation. “At first, it was only a nine-month contract, and you had summers off,” he notes. “Now, it kind of starts in summer. In June, you start getting ready for August and the fall season. Then you build into women's basketball, so from the end of January through March I have three sports going... it gets



to be a lot of hours, and a lot of weekends. You've got to sacrifice some family stuff—but my kids grew up in the Field House!”

Admittedly “an old school guy,” Schulz doesn't mince words when sharing his opinions: “NIL and the Portal are ruining college sports,” he states. “But what can you do? You've gotta evolve with the times, I guess. As I see it, if a coach is inviting you to a school and you're going to that school, you don't say; ‘I'm gonna take my ball and go somewhere else.’ That's not the way I was raised; you stick it out, and if there's a problem, you stay and play with your teammates to be loyal. It's pay to play now, and it's taken the amateur out of it. NCAA had some ridiculous rules, but think about the Olympics... the Miracle on Ice in 1980, when the U.S. went against Russian pros... the Dream Team... I always liked college sports when the money part was out of it.”

AI and technology have him both stymied and confident. “I can barely call my wife,” he exclaims, gesturing at his iPhone.

“Technology is a whole different beast; that's influenced our job more than anything else. It's gotta be instantaneous. It's crazy, and that's the way recruiting is going, because that's how kids are. There is a huge emphasis on social media. I've looked at AI's writing for a website and wonder, ‘is this where we're heading with the profession?’ But then you read some of it... these ‘people’ don't know sports vernacular... there's nothin' better than the real deal.”

And Tom Schulz is definitely the real deal. He is, according to co-worker Noah Syverson, “a fountain of Bobcat Athletics knowledge and history; he bleeds Blue and Gold. He cares deeply about the student-athletes, coaches, and teams he covers, and that care comes through each and every day with his attention to detail. It's been an absolute blessing to work in an office next to his and soak up his expertise through osmosis—he's a professional, and one of the best storytellers I've ever met.”

Schulz describes himself as ‘kind of a family guy.’ “Family

(including sons Nic and Brady, daughter, Grace, sister-in-law, Regan, and granddaughter, Harper) is always over, enjoying one another's company and that of Tilly, his and Pam's golden retriever. “I like to get outdoors, travel around Montana, find a lake, go down to the Park... Growing up, I spent a lot of time outdoors, near the Canadian Boundary Waters (Schulz' mother is Canadian). We built a family cabin in Canada, living in a tent for three months and using a barge to transport all the lumber. I remember a two-week canoe trip in the boundary waters when I was seven. It was my mom and dad, my sister, me, and our dog. We'd looked at the map and headed up and over to a lake, the last 40 miles on dirt. We hiked and fished; there was no electricity, and there were no phones.” When he's not out adventuring, you might catch Schulz watching *Miracle on Ice* with Kurt Russell for the umpteenth time.

Asked about the most challenging situation he recalls, a quizzical look crosses Schulz' face, and his grey eyes narrow. “The hardest part is when there's a change in coaching staff,” he says. “I can't tell you how many volleyball and basketball coaches and assistant coaches I've been through.” On the other hand, he sees the best part of his job as seeing or hearing from former athletes. “Yesterday, one of our all-time best volleyball players visited, and her daughter is going to come to MSU for school. It's also pretty special seeing second generation kids coming to play for the Bobcats, like current volleyball standout Lauren Lindseth, whose mother Kelly (Modrow), played for us in the mid 90s, so those are the kind of perks that mean a lot to me.”



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Like A Good Neighbor, Dan Rust Is There— Ensuring Bobcat Success

BY CYNTHIA LOGAN

"He always knew the right time to blow his whistle and the right time to swallow it." ~ Paul Burns

Dan Rust is the kind of guy you want as a neighbor. You also want him on your team, as your coach, your referee, and most certainly as your insurance agent. With State Farm for over forty

years, Rust's tidy but clearly busy office reflects his priorities and values. Glasses frame his grey-blue eyes; his moustache and hair are just starting to fleck grey. He sports jeans and a red State Farm shirt, as do his assistants.

"Wednesdays and Fridays we wear jeans here," he says. "Wednesdays, we also wear red for State Farm—and organized chaos in the office." A small 'pyramid of values' sits in front of neatly stacked papers at the edge of his

large desk. Photos of his wife, Bertie, daughters Breeanne and Staci, and his four grandchildren adorn the walls, along with awards aplenty; though Rust has climbed the pyramid to the top of his field, family comes first.

A native Montanan of Irish and German descent, Rust was born in Havre, lived in Chester, then moved to Great Falls for junior high (“they called it that back then”), high school, and college. He played basketball through college, and it’s still his passion, though he’s been a member of the Bobcat Quarterback Club for football since its inception.

“Mick Durham was coaching here when the Quarterback Club was founded,” says Rust. “We also saw the potential of how to help the basketball program, so three of us helped Mick found the Sixth Man Club (which now boasts around 200 members).” It’s mostly the business community,” he clarifies, adding; “We have members around the country—people who played here years ago and want to give back, but it’s mostly Montanans. When (now former head basketball coach) Danny Sprinkle got here, Helena and Billings became involved, and our numbers tripled.”

Rust is also a member of the Fast Break Club, an organization for women’s basketball. “I contribute, but I’m not on the Board—Sixth Man takes a lot of time,” he says. He’s also a member of the Chute Boss Club, which supports Bobcat Rodeo. As a matter of fact, Dan Rust has been or is currently involved with just about every sports or community club you could name. “It’s kind of a good old boys’ club—I’ll join yours if you join mine,” he laughs. Rotary bestowed him a community service award, though he’s not a member. The Bozeman Chamber

of Commerce honored him for bringing a high school committee that sponsors events to Bozeman in 1978 to help the economy. “The Belgrade Events Center, the Field House and Bozeman High (BHS) were hosts back in the day,” says Rust. “I joke that you have to die to get off community service Boards.” He is in the Montana Officials Association Hall of Fame, and was the Association of Insurance and Financial Analysts (MTaifa) State President in 1999.

“State Farm corporate has our first NIL (Name, Image and Likeness) person, all-time leading scorer Caitlin Clark of the University of Iowa,” says

“I always knew Dan as an insurance guy and as a ref, but I made the mistake once of getting into an open gym game against him, and it turns out he could play. I had no idea what his background was, but it turned out he’d played at Eastern Montana College in the 1970s.”

Rust. “She’s our first and only so far... Locally, we were told, ‘you can do it, but be careful; know their character.’ It could be a liability. You don’t want to ruin your reputation by trying to help a kid,” he laughs.

Helping kids has been a huge focus for Rust, who volunteered as a referee for 17 years. “I was just out of college, and I missed the game,” he explains. A full-page, framed newspaper article above his desk, written by Paul Burns for the Bozeman Chronicle some 20 years ago, sports the headline A Referee Even Coaches Can Trust. “I recall Dan receiving the utmost respect from coaches,” says Burns. “He was consistently chosen to referee the

state tournaments, which is the highest honor a ref can receive.”

“Officiating for me was very rewarding,” says Rust. “I was awarded post-season tourneys and got to work state championship games. It allowed me to stay in touch with basketball. As a player, I never got closer to the basket than the 3-point line. The game I grew up playing always had a big man inside. Now, the game happens outside the 3-point line. Big men are not a necessity like they used to be. If you have a good bunch of shooters, you can be successful without a big center person. It’s more about

the perimeter now instead of inside the key (free throw lane). I was a guard... not very tall, not very fast, but I could shoot.”

He sure could, according to Burns. “I always knew Dan as an insurance guy and as a ref, but I made the mistake once of getting into an open gym game against him, and it turns out he could play. I had no idea what his background was, but it turned out he’d played at Eastern Montana College in the 1970s. That goes a long ways to explain why he was so good as a ref—he knew the game so well, and always knew the right time to blow his whistle and the right time to swallow it.”

“Big Sky State games at that time

were being founded by my college teammate in Billings,” says Rust. The biggest competition was basketball; I helped him get refs. Pretty soon it was 12 months a year, not just high school season games, and it’s worse now. My fourth-grade grandson is traveling to tournaments... I’d call it out of hand.” Rust also coached boys’ and girls’ basketball games for a number of years; he quit because his kids were starting to play, and he wanted to watch them rather than travel to games.

“My grandson played last weekend in Belgrade, and some stuff he didn’t like happened. I just told him, ‘welcome to my childhood.’ I grew up in Great Falls, where we had a cross-town rivalry; I don’t think it’s a bad thing. They’re just getting it figured out here. Growing pains in Bozeman are inevitable, but at the end of the day it’s not about how many kids compete in athletics, but what quality of education they get.”

Rust has mixed emotions about coach Sprinkle leaving MSU. “I understand he’s trying to get to the elite level of his occupation, and it’s not going to happen in Bozeman; you have to go far in the March tournament to attract attention... and he got a \$700,000 raise to coach in Logan, Utah. I’ve followed basketball here for years, and people do move on. It made it harder because no one has had the success Danny had and then gone up a level, though football coaches have.”

Rust recalls the two Big Sky Conference Championships that Sprinkle and the program procured as the two most exciting seasons he’s experienced. “By far—you now have qualified for the big dance. We’re all lamenting what could have been here if all those kids who still had a year



or two to play had stayed (a few starters accompanied Sprinkle when he left MSU). We’d have been so good! But this is the nature of NCAA these days. They let kids move.... they pay kids to move. In the old days, boosters just gave kids cash. I wouldn’t have a head coaching job for any sport for all the money in the world... the rules change every year; kids have no loyalty with NIL and the transfer portal. You’ve helped them succeed and their thanks are that they leave to go to a better program. It’s a hard way to make a living.”

Even having lost key players and their coach, the Bobcats won their third Big Sky conference tournament championship in a row, and beat the Grizzlies in this year’s championship game, but Rust wasn’t in attendance. “Last year, we won all four basketball

tournaments and the football game, and I went to them all. So I’m not going to tempt fate by attending this year’s matchups. Matt Logie has been successful everywhere he’s been, and Leon Costello has yet to make a bad hire. I trust their judgment and know we will be successful.”

And Rust knows a thing or two about success: as one of the most accomplished insurance agents in Montana, he’s earned the right to enjoy life. An avid golfer since the age of 13, Rust’s current handicap is 10. “In Great Falls, our parents just dropped us at the golf course and that was our daycare,” he recalls. “We weren’t very good, but we had fun. Now it’s what Bertie and I do for a hobby, as well as watch our grandkids.” Being there for your children and grandchildren is one of life’s greatest treasures—surely a measure of true wealth.

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A night to remember Dec 16th, 2022

The week of Dec. 12, 2022, will go down in the history books as a record-breaking blizzard across the Rockies and in the northcentral plains of the United States. For the entire week, a blizzard slammed South Dakota's Black Hills region, along with its sprawling western prairies, southwestern badlands, and glacially tilled farmland in the east. The storm raged in the

Mount Rushmore State, with 50 mile-per-hour winds and snow reported up to 50 in. deep. Along the I90 corridor, hundreds of travelers were stranded as secondary highways and the Interstate were closed for days, all buried under unbelievable drifts.

The small college town of Brookings, home of the Jackrabbits of South Dakota State University,

was scheduled to host the Montana State University Bobcat's football team on Saturday, December 17. The 10-0 Jackrabbit's earned the top-seed in the NCAA Division I playoffs and had just dispatched Holy Cross 42-21 in the quarterfinal game at Dana Dykhouse Stadium the weekend before. The fourth-ranked Bobcats crushed William and Mary 55-7 the same day. The forecast for

the game called for temperatures to be in single digits at kickoff, with wind-chill making for below zero field conditions. The big question was, would there be any people on the sidelines and in the stadium to watch the game?

One of those present for the contest was Sports photographer John Nelson, a 1988 MSU alum and self-professed Bobcat football fanatic, also known as UPSMAN on Bobcatnation.com. John was doing a special interest story on Bobcat tight end Treyton Pickering for the Shelby, Montana Promoter. Pickering, a Sunburst, Montana native, was featured in Shelby's weekly newspaper the week prior to the SDSU game, in an article written by Greg Nelson of Whitefish.

John's presence at the Dykhouse stadium that afternoon was an unlikely oddity, as it took him over two days to drive nearly 1000 miles from his home in Livingston to Brookings. John's trip included a harrowing all-night drive through South Dakota on snow-blown and deserted byways, with routes navigated remotely by two other Bobcat grads. Brother Greg (81 MSU alum) was in Whitefish providing social media coverage, as well as updated weather forecasts, with brother Bob (84) using his pilot's knowledge and the South Dakota Department of Transportation highway website to navigate John's journey from his home in Olney, Maryland. The three were in communication via phone calls, text-messages, and emails, as well as posts on BobcatNation.com. This narrative uses excerpts of all of those resources to outline John's odyssey.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2022

Bob: 3:35 PM Weather forecast for Brookings this Saturday is 10

degrees with 15 mph winds. In other words, really cold!

Greg: 3:36 PM The National Weather Service forecast from South Dakota for the week of Dec 12, 2022:

"A deep low pressure system will slowly track east over the next several days, leading to round after round of snow across the region, becoming progressively fluffier with time as colder air moves in on the backside. High winds will develop with gusts of 40-60 mph, blizzard conditions will exist for multiple days, with the storm exiting the state during the day on Friday, Dec 16th."

Greg: 3:54 PM Hey, John, the Pioneer Press will run our story on Treyton on the front page in Browning, Sunburst, Shelby, Cut Bank, and Valier tomorrow. Print and online too.

Wednesday December 14, 2022

Bob: 10:24 AM Nice article, and six pictures, wow! What's next guys?

Greg: 1:57 PM Semis! Just depends on John getting to Brookings and getting pix/content for a story!

John: 1:58 PM What's next for me...frozen...in the middle of South Dakota. Right now, the Interstate is closed due to the storm. Hopefully, they will open by Friday. We're planning to get to Sioux Falls late Friday. Game time on Saturday is at 3 PM, so we'll get there with plenty of time to spare.

Bob: 2:15 PM Are you going to do an interview with Treyton after the game?

Greg: 2:15 PM For sure, I will be doing a Facebook post with John's highlight photos.

John: 2:18 PM I will schedule

another face-to-face with Treyton in Bozeman prior to the championship game in Frisco.

Greg: 2:19 PM We're planning to continue our series for the Pioneer Press. A semi-final reflection piece from Treyton, a pregame special from his perspective, followed by post-game reflections in mid-January, win or lose. It's all about those semifinal game pics right now, right, John?

John: 2:30 PM Treyton just sent me a text. It reads, "Thank you for the newspaper write up! I think you guys did an amazing job! Was a pleasure to meet you! I'll see you in South Dakota!"

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2022

John: 12:38 PM: Guys, I am leaving for South Dakota shortly. I am taking I90 all the way to Sioux Falls. Hopefully, by the time I get to South Dakota the road will be open. I am not too sure where I am going to spend the night tonight, but I don't want to drive 800 miles tomorrow.

Bob: 1:22 PM Drive safe and stop when you lose daylight!

John: 1:55 PM That's the plan!

Greg: 2:15 PM High winds, 30-50 mph through Wyoming, light snow around the Black Hills, snowing in SD.

John: 4:03 PM Just crossed into Wyoming, roads are a little worse, but still dry in the passing lane.

Bob: 4:17 PM I checked the road cams, it looks good until Sundance, Wyoming, then ice and snow.

John: 4:25 PM Stopping to get gas in Sheridan. A foot of fresh snow here.



Greg: 5:23 PM You should be good to Spearfish tonight. Road reports are dicey after that, the wind is the problem.

John: 5:24 PM Thanks for the update. I have not seen a car in 5 miles. Wow, the gas sign for Gillette shows at \$2.55, pretty cheap!

John: 6:41 PM on his BobcatNation.com post:

@UPSMAN left Livingston at 1:00 pm. The road to Billings was clear, a few icy spots but nothing major. Billings to Gillette, Wyoming both lanes clear, heavy tailwinds made for good time.

I am in Gillette now to gas up and eat, hoping to make it to Rapid city to spend the night. I'll update this thread tonight and tomorrow, hoping more people will want to make the drive. Message me if you need info.

John: 7:44 PM The wind is blowing

hard at Sundance, Wyoming, visibility is about 300 yards, driving slowly. I will hopefully be in Spearfish in an hour.

Greg: 8:27 PM Weather advisory in Rapid City ends at 11 am Friday. In Spearfish, the Travelodge is cheap.

John: 9:00 PM Sounds good, I can use some sleep.

John: 9:54 PM on his BobcatNation.com post:

Gillette to Spearfish roads were okay, some snowpack and ice with some drifting. I had flashers on just to make sure people saw me. I am spending the night in Spearfish, where they closed the roads out of town due to low visibility due to the wind.

Several Responses to this post...

- "This is awesome, passed along to my bro the road warrior."
- "Thoroughly enjoying these first-hand reports of travel. Like dispatches from the battlefield. What an adventure! Can't make the trip this time. Please travel safe Bobcats!"

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2022

John: 7:13 AM from his post on BobcatNation.com:

It's 7:00 AM in Spearfish and had a small blizzard in the area last night and there is 6 inches of new snow. People are checking out of the hotel going someplace. I will update when I get on the road, around 9:00 CST.

Bob: 7:31 AM Getting breakfast?

John: 7:32 AM Getting up now, was doing posts and checking the weather on the laptop.

Greg: 7:32 AM Louie's Diner, up town, looks like the place to go for breakfast.

Casey Conlon 8:13 AM wrote on BobcatNation.com:

Hello! I'm with Q2 News in Billings. I'm looking to do a story on Bobcat fan travel this weekend. Love following your updates. Would you be free for a Zoom interview sometime this morning?

Bob: 8:27 AM Cams across South Dakota show blowing snow.

John: 8:55 AM: I90 is closed!

Greg: 9:00 AM: Just sit tight! Maybe talk to the people at the state highway department.

John: 9:05 AM: Already tried em, the line is busy!

Greg: 9:05 AM Talk to the homies in the restaurant, they might know something.

John: 9:08 AM Everything is closed uptown, including Louie's!

John: 9:13 AM Stopped for gas, getting some pastries here. So much for a hot meal!

John: 9:30 AM from his post on BobcatNation.com

After reviewing all weather reports and talking to South Dakota Troopers, I update BobcatNation with the following: If you have not left Montana, stay home! It looks like I90 will not open till after 5 PM. It's going to be a long day for me, but I am still going to try to make the game, taking secondary highways.

- Response from SDSURABBIT - "Greetings from windy Pierre, SD as we are still in blizzard warning for much of the state. 4 of us are still planning to make the trip to Brookings tomorrow morning via Highway 14 to cheer on the Jacks! I have heard that Highway 34 (Can get from Sturgis to Pierre) became unpassable last night at multiple spots.

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I would stick with taking I90 as that is what the state will want to have open first. Safe travels @Upsman!"

Bob: 9:42 AM Ok, John, you can get to Rapid City. Take East Colorado Road to US 85, and go south to Deadwood, then 385 to US 44 into Rapid City.

Greg: 9:43 AM Then go north from Rapid to 212, then east?

Bob: 9:50 AM Its all about the wind, the middle of the state is still nasty!

John: 11:39 AM from his post on BobcatNation.com

I took secondary Hwy from Spearfish to Deadwood 385 south on Hwy 44 to Rapid City.

It was 50 mph, road was snowpacked, but not icy, with good visibility through the hills.

Sun is shining, not much wind here.

Several responses:

•"Best of luck, we're all rooting for you from back home in Montana!"

•"Made it to New Leipzig, North Dakota heading down Highway 49 trying to get to Highway 12 in Mobridge".

Bob: 12:32 PM What is happening in Rapid City?

John: 12:34 PM They have I90 closed east of Ellsworth Air Force Base.

John: 1:39 PM Gates are still down,

are there any roads open north of the freeway? I am at the Flying J Truckstop and gonna talk to truckers inside, maybe they know something.

Bob: 2:14 PM Ok, not many alternative routes, as Hwy 44 to the south is off the table, due to drifts. I90 is still drifted and closed. With no traffic, they just can't keep it open with wind gusts from 30-55 mph. Looking at the weather data, roads may begin to open around 4 PM.

Bob: 4:06 PM I90 going west out of Rapid City is showing as open. Mitchell to Sioux Falls is opened. John, any news?

John: 4:20 PM Gates are still down. Sitting in the Flying J parking lot, watching UIW and NDSU on the Ipad.

Bob: 6:28 PM Looks like you are stuck, gonna get a room, John?

John: 6:30 PM My truck, pillows and a sleeping bag.

Bob: 6:31 PM It's pretty cold for that.

Greg: 6:33 PM It will make for a better story, lol. Sleeping in the rig, just like the truckers do! I will bet there are many sitting right next to him.

Bob: 7:37 PM SDOT says I90 won't be open till tomorrow afternoon. I think Brookings might be out of the question.

Greg: 7:37 PM I wouldn't go that far; it is eight hours if we can find open secondary roads.

Bob: 7:49 PM Ok guys, I have been working on a secondary route for a while. John, you need to backtrack west on I90 to Whitewood SD, then go north to Belle Fouché via SD 34. Then go to Newell via US



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212. From there go to Faith via 212, which is a long stretch of 75 miles. From Faith, go to Dupree, then on to Isabel via SD 65. After Isabel, go to the US12 junction via SD 20. On US12, go across Lake Oahe to Mobridge. The trip gets easier then as you continue on to Aberdeen, which is 100 miles of straight highway. From Belle Fouché to Aberdeen is 312 miles, or about six hours driving time.

Greg: 8:02 PM Plus two more hours to get to Brookings, right?

Bob: 8:03 PM Aberdeen to Brookings is 146 miles, about 2.5 hours.

Greg: 8:04 PM So, figure ten hours of travel time, with piss and gas breaks? John, are you following?

John: 8:14 PM I checked out the route on my laptop. It sounds

good guys, I'm tired of sitting here and am on my way to Newell!

Bob: 8:15 PM Copy, good luck and be safe.

John: 8:52 PM I am on 212 now heading to Newell and have 177 miles to go to Mobridge.

Bob: 8:56 PM Don't forget at Dupree to take SD65 to Mobridge, it will be tricky to see in the dark.

Greg: 9:28 PM Cams show big drifts past Faith and around Dupree. East of Mobridge looks good all the way to Aberdeen.

John: 9:29 PM I am about 30 miles from Faith, roads are dry and clear here. It's nice to know that you guys are staying up with me because I've only seen about three cars and there is nothing out here but snow and jack rabbits.

Maybe that is a bad omen?

Greg: 10:04 PM on John's post at BobcatNation.com

UPSGUY has bagged I90 and is nearing Mobridge SD on secondary roads 212, 65 and 20. He will then go east on 12 to Webster, where he is turning south to Waterton, where he'll jump on I29 to Brookings. He should be there by 4 am, when he'll take a nap, then get to the stadium before 2 PM.

John: 10:45 PM Heading to Isabel now.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2022

John: 12:40 AM I made it to Mobridge, the road to Isabel was solid ice, so it took a while. I also came up to this car an hour outside of Mobridge. It was going about 15

mph, and I slowly passed them. Suddenly, I saw a hand waving out the driver's side window and they were flashing their brights at me. I pulled over and got out, and they pulled up beside me. A young guy jumps out and tells me he is trying to get to Mobridge and is worried about getting stuck in the snowdrifts. His wife was freaking out, as they had a baby with them. "Can we follow you to Mobridge?," he asked. I said "Yep, but don't get too close, due to the snow cloud. Just keep my taillights in view, I will slow down a bit." When I stopped to get gas in Mobridge, they pulled in next to me and the wife jumped out and gave me a hug and thanked me for helping them make it.

Bob: 12:41 AM Wow, nice job! The wind going east is getting slower.

John: 2:54 AM Made it to Aberdeen. I am wide-awake and heading for Brookings. I am taking Hwy 12 to Webster, then 25 and 20 to Watertown, then down to Brookings on I29.

Bob: 4:57 AM How are you doing?

John: 9:57 AM from his post on BobcatNation.com

My fellow Bobcat fans, I finally made it to Brookings! What a trip!

When I found out I90 was probably not going to open up in until later today, at 8:00 pm last night I talked to my brothers Greg and Bob about a Plan B. Bob, who is in Maryland, gave me a route through northcentral South Dakota. From Rapid City, I headed back to Spearfish on I90 and then north to Belle Fourche. From there I would head east on the secondary highways. The drive across a deserted Hwy 212 from Newell to Faith, and up through Dupree to Mobridge, made me recall the driving skills learned from UPS.

There was almost no one on the road

except Jackrabbits, lol. Believe me, I was glad to be driving my 2019 Dodge Laramie, with my brothers on the phone and their computers feeding information and reassuring me for most of the night.

The drive was actually pretty uneventful, a few bad snow blown areas, with icy sections, but nothing as bad as Bear Canyon in the winter just outside of Bozeman. Anyway, I got about four hours of sleep, and I see a bright shiny day. I will be easy to spot today at the game just look for the old gray-beard on the sidelines with 2 cameras hanging around my neck. It is an exciting time to be a Bobcat. Go-Cats!

Responses

• Post by Joe Bobcat » Sat Dec 17, 2022 10:31 am

Glad you made it! You sound like a very determined driver and Bobcat fan! Thankfully, the Cats are determined and destined to win this game so you will be rewarded for your efforts to be there in person. Over the years every UPS driver that delivered to our neck of the sticks

has been determined and capable."

• Post by catatac » Sat Dec 17, 2022 11:14 am

"Wow, I love the dedication buddy! Somebody should get that description of the ordeal to the players... so they know just how dedicated some fans are! Might give them a tiny bit of extra juice - lol."

Bob: 11:28 AM Are you awake yet?

John: 11:28 AM Yep, going to the stadium after breakfast.

John: 12:28 PM I went to Perkins, but it was so packed I headed back to McDonalds, and then went to the stadium to get my credential.

Bob: 12:30 PM Nice badge!

Greg: 12:30 PM Yep, big time now. I will let everyone online know you are in Brookings and are ready to go! It might be a little brisk though!

John: 2:00 PM It's cold out here, maybe below zero with the wind chill.



STANDING ON A MOUNTAINTOP:
BOBCAT HALL-OF-FAMER

JODY
OWENS



BY PAUL BURNS

“He makes a helluva coach because he’s able to keep his cool and think through problems in a very meticulous way.” ~ MSU Regents

Professor Brett Walker

Jody Owens was consumed with W’s back in the day. The No. 1 W in his life as an All-American linebacker for Montana State was Wins. But there were five more W’s that made the football player a star undergraduate in the Department of History over a decade ago:

WHEN? 1956.
WHERE? Little Rock, Arkansas.
WHAT? The Aluminum Bowl.
WHO? Montana State College and St. Joseph’s of Indiana.
WHY? The battle for the NAIA National Championship.

Any questions? If so, direct them to Owens, who was a college student who happened to play football in the early 2010s. As good as he was on the gridiron, he was also an invested and engaged student. “I really liked him because he was a real thoughtful guy,” MSU Regents Professor Brett Walker

recalls. “He’s got a very thoughtful demeanor. His approach is not one to wag his finger, point his finger, condemn people. He’s so much more. He’s just thoughtful; that’s the word that comes to mind.”

Which is considered to be a necessary trait for an outstanding football coach. Walker thinks Owens could have gone into academia, but the former Bobcat chose coaching instead. And now he’s back in Bozeman coaching Bobcat safeties in 2024, on the heels of his 2023 introduction into the Bobcat Hall of Fame.

But why would Owens care about a long-forgotten football game while an undergraduate in the spring of 2013? Walker guided Owens through the athlete’s senior capstone project that semester. Owens chose to highlight the college career of Charlie Jackson, an All-America who lined up for those 1956 Bobcats alongside all-time Bobcat great Sonny Holland. While Holland deservedly received most of the attention, he couldn’t have been great without Jackson alongside him, just as Jackson couldn’t have been great without Holland.

In Little Rock in 1956, MSU and St. Joseph’s played to a scoreless tie in a driving rainstorm. Other than giving MSU its first national title, the game didn’t really garner much publicity. But what Owens’ research produced was a detailed account of Jackson’s trip to the game. See, Jackson was an African American, as is Owens. And back then, Jackson wasn’t allowed to stay in the same hotel or eat in the same restaurants as the team due to local Jim Crow laws. This was a year before the Little Rock Nine refused to attend an all-black high school, which exposed the state’s racism for all to see.

Jackson was surely upset by the



treatment, but instead of raging against the machine, he took out his aggressions on the football field. “He was the only African American on the team,” Owens said. “He was an All-American and contributed at a very high level and he was part of the success, yet he wasn’t treated fairly. That’s the connection between my major and what I love to do, coach football.”

Walker suspects that Owens was probably exposed to some subtle racism during his days as an undergraduate. “He’s in a classroom full of white, rural Montana kids,” Walker recalls. “He doesn’t open his mouth unless he’s thought through what he wants to say. I’m sure he makes a helluva coach because he’s able to keep his cool and think through problems in a very meticulous way. He could have stayed in academics. It may not have been as fulfilling a route for him. What he got to instead, what he came around to, is sports leadership.”

Owens’ route back to Bozeman

covered a lot of stops. He toiled at high schools in his native Texas. He did one stint as a grad assistant at MSU for former coach Jeff Choate before short stays at Nevada and Washington. Later on, he hooked up with former Bobcat coach Brian Wright (recently named head coach at Northern Arizona) at Pittsburgh State. He’s also helped coach the offense for the NFL’s Carolina Panthers, where he worked with all-world Christian McCaffrey, and just prior to landing again at MSU, he had a brief four-game role as head coach at a small, private HBCU: Saint Augustine’s in Raleigh, N.C. “It’s been quite the journey,” Owens admits. His time at Saint Augustine’s was difficult, having been named the head coach on a Friday, one day before his team lost to Johnson C. Smith 14-6. The NCAA Division II team was 0-10 last fall, losing its final four games with Owens in charge.

Instead of lamenting his time in a near-hopeless situation in Raleigh, Owens instead chooses to focus on the positives. “It wasn’t the best



season I've ever been a part of; it had its challenges," he admits. "Through those challenges, that's what makes you who you are when you are able to stand on top of the mountain. When you go from Saint Augustine's to

Montana State, you're definitely grateful for the support you have. While I was (head coach) it showed me the importance of having the right people around me when I get another opportunity to be in that chair." Then, almost



as an afterthought, he adds, "I don't think there's a better place than Montana State."

Now he's back in the Big Sky Conference, where he excelled for the Bobcats, earning his second All-America accolade and being named the league's defensive player of the year as a senior in 2012 on a team that went 11-2 under coach Rob Ash. Anchored by Owens and Buck Buchanan winner Caleb Schreibeis, MSU led the conference in total defense, sacks and tackles for loss that year.

"Jody brings a varied experience that has seen him coach at all levels, with a primary focus on the defensive side of the ball," current coach Brent Vigen understates. "Additionally, as a former Bobcat student-athlete and coach, he has a tremendous passion for Montana State University and the Bozeman community."

This is the third time Owens has arrived in the Gallatin Valley. The first, as an 18-year-old freshman out of Texas, was more difficult than his next two times, when he came to coach. "I didn't know what I was getting myself into, if I'm being honest," he says today. He hoped "it was a good place, a place I could thrive. I have an open mind and I knew that I would meet a lot of people who would help me develop as a person into the man I am today."

He gravitated toward MSU's history department and its acclaimed faculty, like Walker. "They definitely embraced me," Owens says of the staff. "It was the only thing I was interested in when I was in school. You should do what you love."

It started out as a love of history, mainly post-Civil War. "If you don't know about the past, history has a funny way of repeating itself," Owens says. "So just being

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cognizant of the way things happened and why they happened. And being aware of the people telling the story; being able to look at things through different lenses gives you insight to why things are the way they are, and why perspectives are the way they are.”

In a way, Owens is speaking of his own life as a teenager coming to Bozeman. “There are some things that come up that you need to have an open eye to realize it’s not always the same for everybody,” he says. For instance, he grew up without a father, and he and his 15-year-old mother often struggled to get by. “She wanted to make sure I would get a lot of experiences that she didn’t have.”

“If you’re born to a mom and dad that went to college, you’re expected to go to college. It’s in the culture, and he doesn’t come from that,” Walker says. “Every decision he made, every time he succeeded, in a way, he was kind of defying the odds a little.”

“If you’re born to a mom and dad that went to college, you’re expected to go to college. It’s in the culture, and he doesn’t come from that.”

His grandfather became a surrogate father, guiding him through a productive high school career in the Dallas suburb of Mesquite and doing his best to prepare him for life in Bozeman. “Forgiveness has taken place,” Owens says of his absent father. As a father of two boys himself, Owens and his own father have “gotten a lot closer now that I’m an adult and he has grandchildren.”

Owens says the Bozeman of the mid-2020s is different than the Bozeman he saw as a player. “As a program and a community we’ve come a long way, but there’s still so much further that we can go in terms of understanding perspective and being open minded to people that come from different backgrounds and the

value that someone can bring, not just athletically,” he says.

Among others, Owens is referring to people like Charlie Jackson who, long before Owens was born, helped pave the way for the African Americans who would follow in later years.

“He wrote about things like race and athletics,” Walker says. “These are things that are constantly in the news today and he wasn’t afraid to go after those things. We’re talking about a different era; it was pre-intensive social media. A lot has changed, but in that era he was a pretty remarkable young guy.”

Walker was talking of Owens, but he could just as easily been speaking of Jackson. Both were pretty remarkable young men.



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STILL A BOBCAT

West Goes East For the Summer (House)



I Never Thought I'd Work In New York City And Be Sent To Big Sky, Montana!

BY CYNTHIA LOGAN

Bozeman fans of Bravo's reality TV show Summer House may recognize season eight's new cast member, MSU grad and former Bobcat football safety, West Wilson.

He's been welcomed with great enthusiasm; as 'Lilly' gushed on Instagram: "I fall a lil'more infatuated with you with every episode I watch. Can I just say you're the perfect combo of wholesome, down to earth and hot! It's refreshing to have you on Summer House. You just seem like an incredible person."

That impression seems just right. From all accounts, Westling Conrad Wilson, who grew up in Columbia, Missouri, has always been friendly, outgoing, and fun. In sixth grade, he went to Australia for two weeks with People to People (a program that fosters international understanding and friendship through educational, cultural and humanitarian activities); at Rock Bridge High School, he earned all-district honors, and ran a leg on a standout 4x100 meter relay team in track his senior year. He was also a team captain, a member of National Honor Society, the athletic student body president, and student board president.

Along with his successful Summer House debut, Wilson's position as Sports Social and Editorial Producer for Complex Sports has catapulted him into the limelight. "The NFL and others lean on us to provide millennial appeal," says the thirty year old. "I cover sports events; I use my eye to flip moments into potentially viral content. I always joke about explaining my job to my grandparents, telling them I make social ideas and execute content for this brand."

His first event after the pandemic was a golf match at Moonlight Basin, which he did for Bleacher Report with participants Tom Brady, Aaron Rogers, Phil Mickelson, and

Bryson DeChambeau. "Before that match, they put me in a golf cart protected with metal fences and hit balls at me for charity," laughs Wilson. "I never thought I'd work in New York and be sent to Big Sky, Montana!"

But hey, Montana is where it all started: in 2014, West Wilson showed up at MSU, where he majored in Business Marketing and played football at safety. He lettered all four years, one of his primary goals as a walk on. "I broke my leg my junior year (the injury was so serious he couldn't walk for two months), so my playing time peaked as a sophomore—although, my first game back after rehab, I got an interception in Bobcat Stadium, so that was a super special moment for me."

As someone who could bridge cultural divides in the locker room, Wilson was still a valued teammate (particularly by roommate Alex Singleton) and, being such a creative, fun guy,

he wasn't going to simply sit on the sidelines. Instead, he produced Montana Summer 2014, a montage of bridges, lakes, boats, and country music festivals, set to snappy tunes. "It was mostly football players and cute girls," says Wilson. It got a lot of traction and was a big hit, even making a Bozeman news station or two," he recalls. Montana Summer 2015 and Montana Summer 2016 followed; the clips have garnered 30,000 cumulative views on YouTube.

During fall camp his senior year, a squirrel got into the locker room, providing another creative opportunity. "All the guys were chasing it around, yelling, trying to run away," relates Wilson. "I was in the training room and heard about it, so I pooled the guys and said, 'send me your videos.' I put them together with a goofy banjo behind it (ala a western comedy) and tweeted it... I woke up to see that it had been viewed a million times in 24 hours. A





producer from MTV hit me up the next week—that was my first viral piece of content.”

Also during his senior year, Wilson produced and hosted *Out West*, an MSU Athletics show. “The video department gave me a mic the day we traveled before a game; I’d interview my boys as we sat in the airport... it was click bait for fans to watch,” says Wilson. “We did that for four games in 2017.”

Just after graduation, Wilson briefly interned at Pandora in Dallas, then became a Production Assistant for Major League Baseball. After a short stint as Project Manager at Mediaplanet in 2019, Wilson joined *Bleacher Report*. Supplementing that

employment, he took his entrepreneurial aspirations to New York, where he worked “some crappy jobs” before teaming up with David Leitao, a buddy from high school who’d also moved to New York, to create Napkins Media LLC. “It was before Tik Tok; we were ahead of our time,” notes Wilson. “It was also pre-Covid, so we did food events and festivals every weekend, calling our production Napkins. We found a photographer on Craigslist to follow us around as we talked to folks about what they were eating and drinking. I put it on Instagram and YouTube; then, I’d pitch organizers and venues. It was going really well until the pandemic shut things down. Napkins is one of the things I’m really proud of; it was

important in my career. I like being on camera and producing stuff; I like to story tell.”

Living in New York City hasn’t been ‘the most fun place financially’ for Wilson, but he says he appreciates the chaos, and likes being one of the few people with Missouri and Montana ties. “It’s a melting pot of personalities, and a jungle of bars, restaurants and parks.” Wilson shares a place in midtown (Hell’s Kitchen) with Will Moss, whom he met while both were working entry level sales jobs. “It was not sunshine and rainbows,” says Moss—“and we both got fired. We’ve lived together nearly five years; I’m super proud of him. Watching him on the show is a breath of fresh air. People love

him because what you see on the show is actually the way he is—genuine and authentic. It's great to have known him before all this, to see how he's handled everything. His parents have instilled good stuff!"

And good stuff has come West's way: working with Bleacher Report and Complex Sports has afforded him entrée to some seriously cool events, like covering the NBA finals, the World Series, MLB playoff games, and pop culture to-dos with famous rappers and actors. "I went to Home Run Derby in the Bahamas; we were on jet skis as baseballs were hit into the ocean," says Wilson. "For someone who didn't major in journalism, it's pretty surreal... I interviewed Patrick Mahomes last week, and we played catch. It never gets old."

So what's a super fun, kinda famous guy do for fun when he's not having fun on the job? "New York is tricky—there's a lot of drinking in New York City; it's kind of the culture here, so it's good to get out. I learned how to get out of Manhattan and take the train to the Jersey shore, or to the beach on Long Island. You have to leave New York to get a good nature weekend in. I go back to Missouri for Chiefs games; usually, there's a wedding in Montana in the summer, and I try to get to one Bobcat football game each year." In fall, I watch every Bobcat game and every Chiefs game. In 2018, there was a Cat / Griz party at some bar in midtown New York City—the "Miracle in Missoula" game, and when we won, it was unreal. I try to make Cat / Griz if it's in Bozeman. I did Gold Rush last year."

West Wilson appreciates his Alma Mater, and uses his

newfound status to "fight" to get MSU on big, branded channels. "Someone needs to be pushing out Montana State stuff from afar, so I share stuff with those I'm affiliated with. In 2022, I snuck in some Tik Toks when the 'Cats went against North Dakota State. Bobcat Athletics has a good video department; I'm proud and happy that MSU has invested in that department. Garrett Becker did so much for athletics, it's unreal."

Heads up, Bobcat fans: keep an eye out for West Wilson in the stands this fall. Or, hopefully, catch him on Summer House. "They just announced another season; I don't know if I'm going back, but I hope they'll have me again," he says of the show

he describes as "real, not like The Bachelor." Things happen naturally on the show, he says. "Bravo has become massive, with a global, cultish following; viewers are very loyal to the brand. Reality TV is kind of scary; I had concerns, and I was clear with the producers that I wasn't going to sell out if I was going to be cast as a frat dude or a football jock." No typecasting for Wilson; he's multi-faceted, multi-talented, and multi-dimensional. Kind of like what you'd expect from a well-traveled, down-to-earth guy who learned a fair amount of German to be able to communicate with his grandmother in her native tongue.

Prost, Bobcats!

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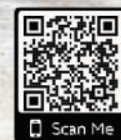
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Dominating On Two

BENJAMIN SEYMOUR

“[What] I will miss the most is running out of the locker room onto the field behind the horses and rodeo team.”

There is no other game like the game of football.

Football is a game made up of individuals coming from all walks of life and ranging from a variety of different ages, heights, and weights. Every player has been intentionally recruited to play a certain position and relentlessly trained to do his 1/11th on each given play. All eleven jobs are specific and unlike the rest. For example, you can't ask a Defensive Tackle to guard a Wide Receiver man-to-man, and you can't ask a Corner to split a double team and make the play in the B gap.

If everyone wins their 1/11th on every rep, the team will win the game. The individual needs the

unit, and the unit needs the individual in order to succeed. The challenge is: how do you get a group of completely different individuals to act as a unit? My answer: an unbreakable bond between one another, and an unwavering commitment to one another to achieve a common goal.

The way that an unbreakable bond is forged between players is through adversity. As players, we are constantly being faced with adversity during winter workout finishers, spring ball snow practices, summer sprints up Peet's Hill, and never-ending fall camp days. All of the adversity a team faces during these trying times is vital to their development together, as one.

This bond, in many cases, is the difference between a good team and a great team, and a great team and an elite team. This bond is difficult to describe because it is more than just a relationship, a shared value, or a culture. It is not something you can necessarily see or hear, but it is absolutely something you can feel. The feeling it creates is something truly exceptional — and every Bobcat player and coach that has ever come through Montana State knows exactly what I am talking about.

At Montana State, we have three common goals. 1) Own the State; 2) Beat the Big Sky, and 3) Win the National Championship. The way that unwavering commitment





to one another is created is through supporting each other, pushing each other, and holding one another accountable.

The way that you support teammates is by having genuine care in your heart. As upperclassmen, you support your teammates by teaching freshmen and new transfers how to do things around here. As underclassmen, you diligently follow the lead and guidance the upperclassmen are giving you. The way that you push teammates is by challenging them to do better because you know that they can. Especially when they do not want to be pushed. Get them comfortable being uncomfortable. The way that you hold each other accountable is by having respect for one another. You need mutual respect to hold someone accountable because both parties will see it as a correction of behavior that is not helping us achieve our common goals rather than someone seeing it as a personal attack.

I observed and learned all of this over my span as a student-athlete on the football team at Montana State. I was taught this through

my own experiences as a follower and a leader, through interactions with teammates, interactions with coaches, and meetings with guest speakers who gave different kinds of messages to the team. My time as a Bobcat has been nothing less than special. Not only was I becoming a better player on the field, I was becoming a better man off the field. All of my coaches and teammates truly prepared me for more than just football. They were preparing me for life.

My journey to Montana State was uncommon, to say the least. It was always my dream since I was a little kid to play football in college. I am undersized for a defensive lineman, so it was tough trying to be recruited while I was in high school. Once I graduated, I had not received any scholarship offers to play football in college. So to further pursue my dream, I chose to go to College of the Canyons, the local Junior College in my city of Valencia, California. After a successful season there, I was starting to be looked at by college coaches. One of the teams I was talking with was Montana State.

At that time, it was Coaches Choate and Hout who were recruiting me

to come play for them. However, they reached out to me when Covid was at its absolute worst and the whole world seemed shut down. So I could not come up to meet the coaches and players, visit the football facility, or tour the campus. All of my recruiting was being done over the phone and via Zoom. They eventually offered me a scholarship and allowed me to achieve my dream, and for that, I will be forever grateful to both of them. After a week of thoughtful consideration between me and my parents, I blindly signed to Montana State, a school I had never heard of before they reached out to me. Little did I know at the time, it would be one of the best decisions I have ever made.

I am so fortunate and grateful to have been a Bobcat football player these past few years. I got to be a part of arguably some of the best teams in school history, and play alongside some all-time Bobcat greats. My time at Montana State is one that most college football players could only hope for. I was able to play in an FCS National Championship game, won the 2022 Big Sky Conference Championship, played in front of College Gameday, and carried around the





Great Divide Trophy in front of 22,000 screaming Bobcat fans.

Bobcat football has given me so many amazing memories and experiences that I will never forget. One of my favorite memories is when we beat South Dakota State in 2021 at home in the Semi-finals game to go on to Frisco, and the stadium played the song, "If you want to play in Texas, you have to have a fiddle in the band." I thought the bleachers were going to break from the crowd of people jumping up and down on them while singing the song. One of the loudest times that I ever experienced in Bobcat Stadium was when we beat the Griz in 2022. The one experience that I will miss the most is running out of the locker room onto the field behind the horses and rodeo

team. I always thought that was the coolest thing we did as a team at home games. There are countless other memories that I will forever share with my teammates and coaches, even just little moments in meetings, in the locker room, at practice, etc.

I am extremely proud to say that I played on the Defensive Line for the Bobcats. It is by far the most difficult position group to be a part of because of the way that Coach [Shawn] Howe and Coach Bap run it. Everything is all about "The Standard." The Standard is the way that you talk, the way that you act, the way that you treat people, the way that you conduct your business, the way you eat, the way you lift, the way you practice, and many, many more ways you can do things. You

are taught that to be coached is to be loved. However, when you are in the heat of being coached, it is often very uncomfortable. Rarely does it ever seem like love. The DL room is full of great guys who are hard-working, resilient, selfless, leaders, and my best friends. We would always break down "Dominate On Two." We have shirts with the peace sign emoji because we all hold up our hands like that in the huddle when we break it down "On Two." That has become our little mantra, and it means a lot to the guys in the DL room, and to me. Reflecting back on all of it now, I see why we had one of the closest groups on the team.

Now that I am wrapping up my football career and moving on to this next chapter of my life, I look back on everything I did as a Bobcat. All of the relationships that I made, all of the memories that I shared, all of the experiences that I had, all that I had to persevere through, and all that I accomplished, are unbelievable. To my coaches, thank you for believing in me and allowing me to learn and grow under you. To my teammates, thank you for being the ones who made my experience so special for me. To my family, thank you for being the ones who always supported me and loved me no matter what. Go Cats! 🐾

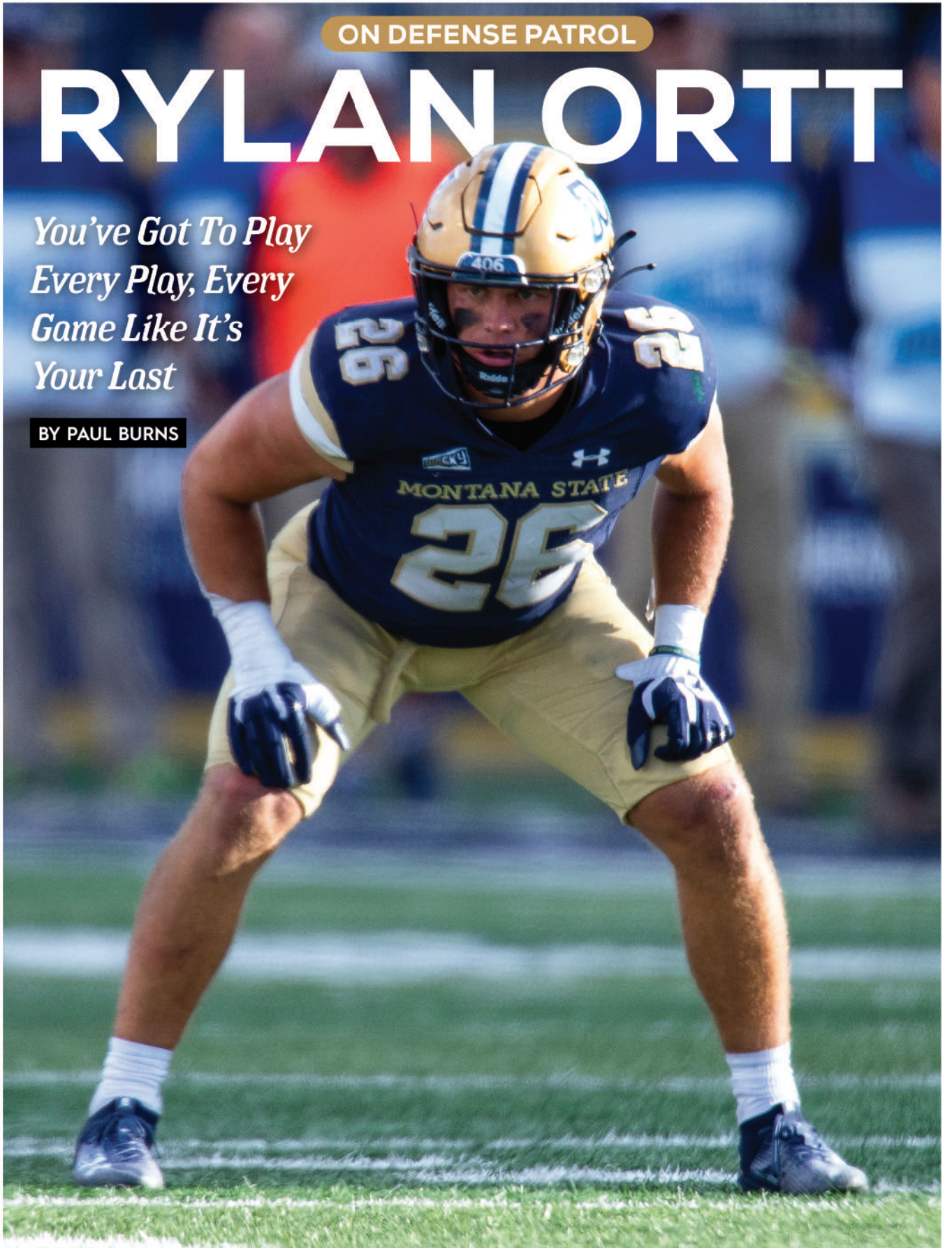


ON DEFENSE PATROL

RYLAN ORTT

*You've Got To Play
Every Play, Every
Game Like It's
Your Last*

BY PAUL BURNS



Montana State likes to boast about all the Gatorade Players of the Year that come to play football for the Bobcats. The list is long: past players like Troy Andersen, Tanner Roderick and Gunnar Brekke, and current players Taco Dowler, Dylan Rollins, Tommy Mellott, and Talon Marsh—all from Montana high schools. There are even Gatorade stars from Wyoming: Colson Coon (twice) and Dane Steel. All of these Bobcats excelled at the previous level, enough to be recognized for the prestigious award that is bestowed upon the best player in each state. The highly coveted award is given in each sport.

With all those great Gatorade athletes coming to MSU, each one's success is usually expected; it's not like they're flying under the radar. However, Rylan Ortt also won the Gatorade award, and not many Bobcat fans know about that. While Ortt excelled on the football field at Missoula Sentinel, he was the state's track Gatorade titlist for his prowess with the javelin.

How good was he in the javelin? He won the State AA title to help Sentinel claim the 2019 championship. Ortt flung the spear 20 feet further than his nearest competitor. In a sport where inches often decide the winner, the 20-foot difference put him atop of Mount Everest while the rest of the throwers remained at sea level.

On the football field, Ortt played quarterback and defensive back. For MSU, he patrols the defense from his safety position. "He's really smart and has a good feel for the game," says MSU safeties coach Jody Owens.

Owens is Ortt's most recent position coach. A new coach is nothing new for Ortt, who's been through thick and thin with Kane Ioane, Freddy Banks,

Kyle Risinger, Willie Mac Garza, and now Owens. The changes can possibly be explained as a result of Ortt entering his sixth season; more years mean a higher likelihood of a coaching change. Ortt redshirted in 2019, then Covid wiped out 2020, which made his freshman season 2021. Now, three years later, he's the quasi-quarterback for the defense.

"It's been cool to learn from so many different guys," Ortt says. "They all have their own wealth of football knowledge, and they've all had their own experiences. It's been somewhat of a blessing to be able to learn from so many different people and see their point of view on football, and pick and choose stuff from everybody."

Ortt pretty much burst on to the scene last season. He collected three interceptions and returned one of them for a touchdown

against Stetson. After the Hatters quarterback pump faked, Ortt moved into a window in the open field. "I just saw his eyes; I was hoping he'd throw it and he threw it, and I was in the right place." Ortt earned all-Big Sky honors for his performance on the field.

If he plays as well in 2024, Ortt hopes to take a crack at the next level. "I would like to play the game of football for as long as I can. (Montana State) sets you up really well for it," he says. "As long as I can stay healthy and do what I do, I feel all I need is a foot in the door to make something happen. That's all you ask for."

Despite his Gatorade accolades and his athletic prowess, not many schools expressed interest in Ortt coming out of Sentinel. "When I came out of high school, I was just looking for a place that wanted me," he says. "I





knew I could make something happen when I got here.”

For obvious reasons, there are not a lot of Missoula high schoolers on the MSU football roster. Ortt came to Bozeman because his options were limited. Sure, he could throw a javelin, but not many schools wanted him for his football skills. So he walked on to the Bobcats and has never regretted his decision to move 200 miles east. “It’s a great place to be. I love the athletic department,” he says. “College football is pretty fun. You do a lot of hard stuff, a lot of hard workouts, practices, games, what not, but you do it with 100 of your friends. You get to hang out with 100 dudes every day.”

Ortt finds the academics enjoyable as well. He has an eye on finances and his degree in business finance, which he completed last December,

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should help him when his playing days are over. “I was going to double major in economics and finance, but the econ classes weren’t as interesting to me as the finance, and I wanted to dive deeper into that.” Ortt’s father Dan is a financial advisor in Missoula. Dan is a Montana grad, but he and Rylan’s mother Shannon have happily converted from Grizzly fans to Bobcat fans. “As a parent, all you want is for your kid to have amazing experiences and be happy,” Dan says.

Ortt is thriving in the classroom as well as on the gridiron, although there were some adjustments he needed to endure shortly after arriving at MSU. “In high school, I could take a class and not put a ton of effort into it,” he says. “College made me realize you’ve got to lock in on some of these classes and not just go

through the motions. I definitely had to go through that.”

There aren't many people named Rylan in this world. Before Ortt, there was Rylan Jollymore, a gifted Grizzly linebacker now living in Columbia Falls. The Ortt and the Jollymores have never met, but Dan and Shannon came across the name when Jollymore was on campus in Missoula. “It was just a unique name,” Dan explains.

Jollymore has never heard of the Ortt family, and as a Griz fan, he had no idea there was a Rylan on the Bobcat roster. “I'm humbled and honored to think they named their son after me,” he says.

As his class load has eased up, Ortt is now finding time for other topics, like coaching midget football in Bozeman, playing golf, or fishing the nearby rivers. Even if it's just for fun, Ortt is putting his heart and soul into each activity. “Rylan is one of the most dedicated young men I have had the pleasure of coaching,” former Sentinel track coach Craig Mettler said shortly after Ortt claimed his Gatorade award. “He leads by example. He helped transform our program.”

This season Ortt is clicking under Owens' guidance, along with fellow defensive backs Dru Polidore, Blake Stillwell and Brock Steele, to name a few. Owens, who was an All-America linebacker during his playing days at MSU, has the group playing at a high level. “If you don't play with confidence,” Owens says, “you won't be in the right spots, and you will be thinking instead of reacting. The biggest thing is confidence, and letting them know I've done it before.”

The players appear to be eating up Owens' words. “He's very technical, he brings a lot to the table,” Ortt says of his coach, who spent the 2022 season with the NFL's

Carolina Panthers. “We watch a lot of NFL tape. That's something we never had here, and it's been very beneficial.” One of the important things Ortt has picked up from Owens is that “offenses have a bunch of tendencies and, usually, everybody's kind of a copycat in that sort of way.” That knowledge is helpful when studying an opponent.

With the end of his Bobcat career now closer than the start, Ortt has taken time to evaluate his experiences and look back on his years wearing the Blue and Gold. There have been times (like when he was suspended for the start of the 2022 season for having a banned substance in his system) that Ortt prefers not to remember,

but he expects his final season to be the most rewarding.

“You only get so many opportunities at Bobcat Stadium, you only get so many opportunities to play football in your life,” he says. “You don't know when it could end. It puts it in perspective when you miss a little bit of time; you've got to play every play, every game like it's your last.”

Even if there's no more football after this season, Ortt has enjoyed his days of wearing pads. “When it starts to come down to the end, you don't want to leave that bad. We lead a pretty good life, getting to play football. It's a pretty special thing you don't really get anywhere else in the world.”



MARCUS

BY PAUL BURNS

WEHR

LOYAL TO THE BOBCAT BRAND

I'm all about football now. It's just football, and we'll see where football takes me."

It's well known that Montana State has great offensive linemen year after year. The evidence is in the numbers: MSU is almost always among the nation's leaders in total offense, and that doesn't happen without the big boys up front. Guys like Conner Moore, Justus Perkins and Marcus Wehr are expected to have similar success this season, particularly Wehr.

In recent years, players like Wehr have honed their skills at MSU, then given in to the temptations of FBS football, hoping it's a stepping stone to the NFL or more money through name, image and likeness handouts.

While Wehr, who was an All-American at offensive tackle in 2023, seemed like the perfect candidate to

see what he could accomplish at the next level, the Billings Central product chose to stay a Bobcat. Following last season, MSU saw standout offensive linemen Rush Reimer (Cal), Omar Aigbedion (Baylor) and Jacob Kettels (Kennesaw State) leave for what they perceive as greener pastures. Which begs the question, why didn't Wehr test the waters?

He wasn't even tempted. For him, MSU's pastures are green enough. "It might be different for someone who's not from here, but being from Billings, I just can't imagine not playing (for MSU) or not playing in the game against the dudes over the hill (in Missoula)," Wehr explains. "I have to play in that game."

Truth is, with few exceptions, very





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few products from Montana high schools have left MSU. For many of them, suiting up for the Blue and Gold is all they ever wanted to do, and the thought of leaving before their football days are over just doesn't happen.

Wehr sort of burst on the scene last year. He initially came to MSU to play on the defensive line, but after redshirting in 2019, seeing 2020 canceled due to Covid, and then practicing with the defense at the start of the 2021 season, Wehr was thrust into the offensive line partway through that season. The change came after he was slated to start

the 2021 season at defensive tackle. "I was not ready," he admits. "I kept falling back on the depth chart. That was a rough year for me. "(The coaches) just said, they basically asked, oh, I don't know if they asked or not, they're like, 'Well, you're going over (to the offense) now.'"

Part of the trouble with moving to the offense midway through the season was that he suddenly found himself trying to block Daniel Hardy in practice. Hardy, who was drafted by the Los Angeles Rams after the 2021 season, had a knack for making everyone look bad, both

opponents and teammates. With the change of positions, Wehr still wasn't getting much playing time.

Then came 2022. By then Wehr had figured things out. He learned how to block, whether it was on running plays or passing plays. Meanwhile his teammates and coaches learned they could rely on him. Until they couldn't. In the seventh game of the season against Northern Colorado, he broke his ankle and his season was over. His first chance to play against the dudes over the hill would have to wait. "I heard it crack and then I just rolled over and I was like, 'Well,

that might be it,” Wehr says.

By last season, Wehr was tried and true. He became a leader on the field and in the weight room, and he helped tutor young players like Moore, who blossomed into an outstanding tackle on the left side, while Wehr anchored the right side.

The dudes from over the hill crushed the Bobcats last season, and it’s doubtful any players from either team will forget the outcome soon. Wehr can’t wait for the November game in Bozeman. “I’ve got to feel the weight of the (Great Divide) Trophy on my shoulder.” Which he says is another strong reason for not leaving the Bobcats for NIL money.

But there was a time in his career at MSU that Wehr toyed with the idea of leaving. Not for another campus, but leaving the game. His father is the CEO for Tire-Rama, so he always had the option of going back to Billings to bust tires. It was back in 2021, when he was trying to carve out a spot on the Bobcat defensive line. Nothing was working. “I was thinking of

“The day I stop being happy doing what I’m doing, I’m going to quit; I’m going to hang it up.”

quitting,” he admits. He was one of the strongest players and he practiced well, but “it just all went away. I just had this mental block. It had nothing to do physically.”

None of the Bobcat coaches had yet to recognize that at 6-feet-4 and nearly 300 pounds, Wehr was seemingly built to play offensive tackle. The defense was stacked that year with household names like Troy Andersen, Ty Okada, Chase Benson, Amandre Williams and Daniel Hardy. The chances of Wehr seeing quality minutes on the field were slim. And the lack of playing started eating at him.

“I felt like I was taking up space,” he remembers. “I’m a dude who hates (space) eaters. They think it’s cool to be on the MSU football team... like, ‘I get all these perks and stuff.’ I hated that. I felt like I was not contributing, but I was getting all the perks on the team. That’s what killed me.”

He consulted a local sports counselor who works with MSU athletes. He talked to his dad, often. “I talked to everybody,” he says. “The day I stop being happy doing what I’m doing, I’m going to quit; I’m going to hang it up.” Wehr struggled with the mental aspect of not contributing in the manner he wanted to. Yes, he was on the team, but it was not the way he envisioned it. “How can I help my teammates when I’m not out there? It was more of them helping me get through the season,” he says. “They built me up, took care of me.”

Just when things were bottoming out, Wehr turned the corner. He didn’t quit, he exchanged his No. 90 jersey (defensive line) for No. 76 (offensive line) and now he’s an All-American on a nationally ranked team. “I’m happy that I stayed. I just feel like I can’t do that (quit) to everybody, or to myself.”

This season promises to be a good



one for the Bobcats, especially if the offensive line plays to its potential. Ever since former offensive line coach Brian Armstrong introduced his unique style of blocking, the Bobcats have been great running the ball. And now they're keen on becoming known for their passing as well. "It will match really good with our run game if we can pass the ball when needed," Wehr says.

With Armstrong testing the greener pastures of Fresno State, the Bobcats didn't skip a beat under new line coach Al Johnson. "He came in and saw this group has a lot of experience. How can (Johnson) make us better?" Simple: "Pass protection; that was a big aspect of what he taught." If the focus on passing pays off like Wehr anticipates, the Bobcats are expected to be

more balanced this season. A year ago, they were third in the nation in offense, and averaged almost eight yards a play. But that statistic is skewed by the fact that they ran the ball better than all but one team, yet finished a distant 86th in passing offense. "Everyone knows what we're capable of, but nothing last year means anything this year," Wehr says. "We have to reset our standard and take it even higher."

With the sun starting to set on his college playing days, Wehr figures if he returns to Billings, the door at Tire-Rama will always be open. He worked in the company warehouse while leading Billings Central to the State A high school championship in 2018. "That's where I got strong. I'd lift (weights) in the morning, and then go to work and lift tires all

day," he says. A truck tire weighs around 100 pounds, while a tractor tire can push 500 pounds. "I would always test myself to see if I could get one off the floor. I did, but it's a lot of work."

He graduated in December of 2023 with a degree in business management and is now taking the required six credits to remain eligible. "So I'm all about football now. It's just football, and we'll see where football takes me."

The Bobcats hope that Wehr and his fellow offensive linemen can take the team to Frisco, Texas, to play in the national championship game in January. The Bobcats played there in 2022, and Wehr is counting on this season being different in two ways: the Bobcats will win this time, and he'll play in the game.



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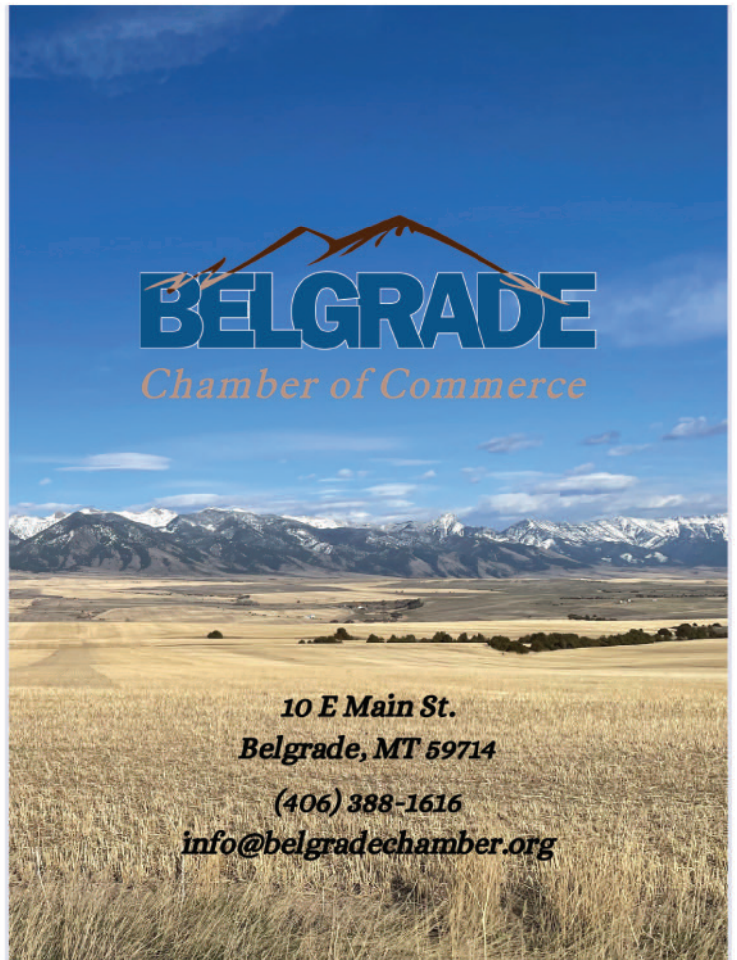
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Julius Davis

Master Hurdler, Master Gamer

... Hurdling Suddenly Became Davis' Calling Card

BY PAUL BURNS

After watching him play in a handful of early-season games, Montana State football fans had come to appreciate running back Julius Davis as a hard-nosed battler aching for extra yards. So it came as a bit of a surprise to some, but by no means all, when the Wisconsin transfer became airborne in last season's seventh game. Up until then, Davis had scored touchdowns and recorded 100-yard afternoons by running through defenses, not by flying over them. But something clicked that day against Sacramento State when Davis hurdled an unsuspecting defender on his way to a 110-yard game.

Around the Big Sky Conference, hurdling suddenly became Davis' calling card. Funny thing was, hurdling defenders, as effective as it might be, is not a habit Davis wants to create, even if it did give him nationwide fame when he

was a running back at Menomonee Falls, a suburb of Milwaukee. Which was why his exploits against Sac State didn't surprise Dan Lutz, his high school coach.

Davis acknowledges there's danger when it comes to clearing defenders in single bounds. "When you hurdle over people, you're definitely taking a huge risk (of being injured) because you're leaving the ground; anything can happen at that point. You never know if you're going to actually clear him." As an afterthought he adds, "My dad doesn't like it."

Lutz, his high school coach, didn't like it either, even after the video appeared of Davis not just hurdling a defender, but completing a picture-perfect 360-degree spin all in the same motion. Sports Illustrated called it the national play of the week back in 2017, when Davis was starting to attract attention as a runner.

"At first I didn't want him to

hurdle,” Lutz said at the time. “Because you can get hurt doing that stuff. That’s what I’ll always remember about him. It wasn’t like he broke away and nobody touched him. He runs through contact. If you’re going to bring him down, you’d better bring him down. That’s the type of runner he is.”

Leaving the ground just makes sense for Davis. “I want to have as many tools in my toolbox as I can,” he says. A toe injury in week four at Weber State slowed him down a little, so Davis said to himself, “OK, I’m a hurdler. I want to make people miss.” Ironically, Davis did run the hurdles back at Menomonee Falls, but the repetitive motion led to a hip flexor injury, forcing him to give it up on the track.

When he was in high school, he was picked as the No. 1 football



prospect in all of Wisconsin, and the 35th best running back in the nation. After his father introduced him to Barry Sanders, Davis took to modeling his style after the great Detroit Lion who made

people miss. But later he took to emulating Marshawn Lynch, who he learned about while playing Madden NFL with his father. The Seattle Seahawk great’s style was different in that he favored running through would-be tacklers.

Whatever style he chose, it was good enough to receive feelers from places like USC, Notre Dame, Alabama, Michigan, Michigan State and a handful of other big-time programs. But he chose Wisconsin, a 75-mile drive from home, early in the recruiting process, which ended a lot of the contacts from many of those places seeking someone with his skills.

But being a Badger wasn’t all it was cracked up to be. A nagging injury left over from his senior season in high school limited his playing time in Madison. In fact, from 2018, his senior season at Menomonee Falls, until 2022, his final season at Wisconsin, he didn’t see the field much. Over that five year span (including the Covid year, 2020) Davis appeared in just 12 football games.

The lack of playing time led Davis to enter the portal in the spring of 2023. MSU’s run-heavy offense



helped entice Davis to Bozeman, as did offensive line coach Al Johnson, who came to MSU from Wisconsin in 2022, a year earlier. "He drew me this way, and once I got here, it was like a no-brainer," Davis says. Like so many, Davis fell in love with Yellowstone National Park, dined on bison, and hiked in the Hyalite drainage south of Bozeman. "I'm from the city, I'd never seen mountains. There are just things I've never done before because I don't have those types of things from where I'm from. I was able to step out of my comfort zone and do those things."

Whatever style he chose, it was good enough to receive feelers from places like USC, Notre Dame, Alabama, Michigan, Michigan State and a handful of other big-time programs.

Another reason he came to MSU was due to ESPN showing College GameDay from Bozeman prior to the November 2022 game against Montana. The show put Bozeman on the map and served as a feature that schools like Wyoming, North Dakota, California and Hawaii couldn't boast about in the recruiting process. GameDay gave Davis his first glimpse of Bobcat football, as well as planted the seed that he might want to visit one day. Six months later he was a Bobcat.

By the time last year's season-





opener against Utah Tech came around, Davis was ready. He didn't disappoint, gaining the first touchdown of his college career. "I didn't know how to feel," he says with a grin. "I looked for the first lineman to throw me in the air." That was then-

freshman Connor Moore, who was also starting in his first game wearing the Blue and Gold.

Because he's quite happy in Bozeman, he has no regrets about his years at Wisconsin, even though he rarely saw the field. "I

learned a lot there. I wouldn't want to change any of my experiences," Davis says. But he admits he gave in to emotions when he chose the Badgers, following in the footsteps of NFL stars like Jonathan Taylor and Ron Dayne. "It was like, I'm from Wisconsin, it's



close to family, it's Running Back U. Sounds like a no-brainer. That's why I made that decision then."

With the benefit of hindsight, Davis saw the error of his youth. "Now that I'm older, I know a lot more things, I've experienced a lot more

things. I would probably pick an offense that's more spread out, where I can kind of get more involved, like in the pass game—a little differently, like I am here."

Last season, MSU ran the ball 480 times while passing 239 times, a two-to-one ratio. Davis was a big part of that while making the Big Sky All-Conference team, gaining 718 yards on 104 carries, both team highs. But it wasn't all Davis. What helps the Bobcats keep on running is that they share the ball; no single player is the feature runner, which keeps all the runners relatively healthy. As usual, quarterback Tommy Mellott frequently had the ball in his hands, topping 100 yards a team-best four times. Current sophomore Scottre Humphrey went over 100 yards once, as did Sean Chambers, who exhausted his eligibility; Davis himself went past the century mark three times with a career-high 132 against Weber State.

"Our running back room has so much depth," Davis states. The success comes from everyone doing their job, including the Bobcat wide receivers, who often deliver critical downfield blocks. "We block so they can get the ball, and they block so we can get the ball," he says of the likes of Taco Dowler, Ty McCullouch and Lonyatta Alexander.

Before leaving Wisconsin, Davis earned an undergraduate degree

and is currently working on a master's degree in community health. The affable young man is not sure what will happen after football. "I love to talk to people, but I'm not really set on anything," he says. "I wouldn't be opposed to staying here (in Bozeman). It's dope here. It feels normal to me here. It was easy to adjust."

The Bobcat [NIL] Collective also helps. His T-shirt features a smiling Davis hurdling a hapless defender. Both the smile and the leaping are his trademarks. But those aren't the features he's known for in some of his social media circles. While nursing his injured knee back to health this spring and summer, Davis continued to hone his skills as a master of Call of Duty. He says he's one of the top one percent of all players, sort of like the Warren Buffett of the video game world. So now, while he pushes his T-shirt, he's also pushing his status as a gamer. "I started posting and people were like, 'Dude, I didn't know you were that good.' If I'm not working on football, if I'm not working on school, that's probably what I'm doing."

There's a chance his injured knee will keep him off the field for a good part of this season, but Davis, who has one season of eligibility remaining, vows to return. When that happens, you can catch his act at the hurdles.





DEFYING GRAVITY

Brendan Hall Is Getting His Kicks

It's the rare athlete who earns a degree in just four years while transferring in the middle of his education.

BY PAUL BURNS

Brendan Hall kicks a football like not many others. The lanky Texan's punts soar so high and so far that it seems to contradict all that fuss that Isaac Newton babbled about. If Newtown had only been able to watch Hall punt, perhaps the supposed apple that fell out of the tree and bonked the good sir on the head would have been merely eaten and not contemplated. In other words, Hall gets a kick out of defying gravity, literally.

The All-American punter often flipped the field for Montana State last season: kicking from deep in his own territory and watching the other team take control deep in their own territory. Not only would Hall kick it far, but he kicked it high, giving the MSU gunners ample time to race down the field and corral the returner

before he had anywhere to go. At better than 46 yards a punt, Hall is a great weapon and one of the reasons the Bobcats were 8-4 and advanced to the playoffs last fall. Had he punted more often, Hall would have ranked as the third best punter in the nation, but his lack of attempts kept him off the list of NCAA leaders. He'll continue his punting duties this fall along with his usual flair for putting the ball in (or beyond) the end zone on kickoffs.

How does he do it? Well, standing 6-foot-9 has a lot to do with it. "Longer legs are good for more torque," Hall explains. Torque? That's a physics term, isn't it? Or, in Hall's case, a mechanical engineering reference. That's what brought him to Bozeman. Out of high school, Hall played for two seasons at Southern Methodist, but after a coaching change at the Dallas-area school, Hall opted for a change of scenery. "Things didn't quite work out as I would have hoped," he says. "I

wanted a new place, a new home, and this seemed to be the place."

Hall tossed his name in the portal after the 2022 season and a handful of teams came calling. But he clicked best with the Bobcats and MSU's excellent mechanical engineering program. He couldn't resist the call of the wild that makes up the Montana landscape. From the greater Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, "if you want to see hills, you have to go to San Antonio," Hall says, not entirely in jest. That meant a four-hour drive, the same amount of time it takes to fly to Bozeman, which has better snow skiing and trout fishing than anything San Antonio has to offer.

His time at SMU could have been more rewarding, but "I don't regret anything because it led me to where I am today," he says with contentment and a smile. In the summer of 2023, Hall wrote on his Twitter page, "Learn to forgive and don't hold grudges."

And he's on track to graduate in May with that coveted ME degree, which is an accomplishment in and of itself because it's the rare athlete who earns a degree in

just four years while transferring in the middle of his education. For a fellow who knows a little about gravitational pull, Hall says he would really like to work for a corporation like Bell Helicopter, Boeing, or Lockheed-Martin, which are all about getting things off the ground. That is, if a chance to catch on with an NFL team as a punter doesn't crop up a year from now.

The thing about punts and kickoffs, however, is that accuracy doesn't matter very much. Hall just winds up and sends the ball, which weighs less than a pound, into the atmosphere. When it comes to extra points and field goals, the Bobcats, not only Hall, had plenty of troubles last season. Between Hall and Casey Kautzman, the pair missed seven point-after attempts and nine field goals. It could be said that the kicking game cost the Bobcats in a

regular season loss at Idaho and in their playoff loss at home against North Dakota State back in December. "As it always does, life will go on and we will each continue our growth to be our best selves," Hall wrote on Twitter after the loss to the Bison.

The reality of it is that a missed kick is what is remembered. But almost always, long before the kick that might have tied or won a game for MSU, there were dropped passes, questionable play calling, poor clock management, inaccurate throws, or defensive lapses. The game is so multifaceted that it's not fair to point a finger at a single individual or play. On top of that, the intricacies of kicking are complex by themselves. On a kickoff, it's just Hall. On a punt, there's a long snapper in the mix, but very little stress is involved on what's usually a pretty routine play.

On an extra point or field goal, there are so many more pieces to the puzzle. For starters, the kicker is a mere seven yards from the line of scrimmage, giving the defense a chance to create havoc. Then there's senior Tommy Sullivan, who may be the best long snapper in the conference, but he's still got to deliver the ball in a line drive to the holder.

Last season's holder was Luke Abshire, who left the team over the winter. This season, the Bobcats are asking backup quarterback Patrick Duchien to take on the holding duties. From between Sullivan's legs, to Duchien's hands, to the kicker's right foot takes about a second. The kicker has to adjust to his teammates' rhythms; there are so many moving parts and so many chances for an error to occur.

It's not like we're letting Hall or Kautzman off the hook for their



miscues, but it's important to note that they shouldn't shoulder the blame alone. Still, that doesn't take away from the fact that MSU missed its last three field goal attempts of the season. "We were very inconsistent," coach Brent Vigen says. "Some years those inconsistencies don't get exposed as much as they did last year."

Hall says when it was his turn for those kicks, he was able to trot on to the field with a clear mind. "I was pretty calm, same as I was in practice," Hall says. "It just didn't come off for me. I didn't do as well as I would have liked to, of course." Hall was the place kicker until he missed two field goals in the loss at Idaho in game eight. Kautzman had the duties for the last four games, also with mixed success. It's important to remember that after Hall lost his place kicking responsibilities last season, he was one of the first to run out on the field and congratulate Kautzman after a successful field goal at Northern Arizona in game nine. Hall says the two are friends and root for each other because when one succeeds, the team succeeds.

By all accounts, both kickers were excellent in practice last fall and this spring. But it's one thing to make a field goal in front of 80 teammates and quite another to miss a field goal in front of 20,000 howling fans, half of whom really, really want him to miss. "When I'm out there, it's like everything is quiet," Hall says. "I don't really pay attention to anything but the ball and what I need to be doing."

Vigen says the team is taking a new approach to practicing kicks this season. In the past, after the defense got its reps in and then the offense did the same, toward the end of practice



"I was pretty calm, same as I was in practice. It just didn't come off for me. I didn't do as well as I would have liked to, of course."

there would be time for kicking. The new plan is to mix it up in practice, keep the kickers always prepared. In the middle of a defensive drill, the whistle may blow and Kautzman or Hall will be called upon to kick a field goal before the offense and defense go back to what they were previously doing. This past spring, Kautzman received more reps in practice than Hall.

"Putting them on the spot in practice, that's the hard part," Vigen says. "When they're on the spot, they're on the spot; to replicate that in practice is challenging. We have to do everything we can to make them feel that at least all 100-plus (pairs of) eyes between the players and the coaches, are on them."

Hall shines when everyone watches him punt or kickoff. As a sign of his success, Hall has never participated in bringing down the kick returner. Partly because his kicks don't get returned and partly because the MSU kick coverage is so good. "I don't tackle," he says with a laugh. One time, "I just got in the way so the (returner) had to cut back and get tackled by someone who's a little better at that."

For someone who's built more for basketball but grew up playing soccer until he outgrew that sport, Hall has always gotten his kicks out of laying a foot into a ball. Right now, on the cusp of another football season, Hall's feet are planted firmly on the ground. But for the future mechanical engineer, the sky's the limit.



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THE BLUEPRINT

ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING

BY MATT LOGIE

"If You Build It Right, It Will Last Forever."



The date will be forever etched in my memory: April 19, 2023. When athletic director Leon Costello introduced me as the next Head Men's Basketball Coach at MSU, it was the culmination of a lifelong dream and 20 years of dedication as an assistant coach and small-college head coach. However, the date also held significance due to the challenges it presented. I was the last Division I head coach hired. The NCAA Transfer portal had been open since early March. I didn't yet know which players from the back-to-back Big Sky Champions would stay at MSU, but I did know who I wanted by my side in taking on this challenge. Two days later assistant coaches Sam Scholl, Zach



Payne, and Julius Smith were in Bozeman and ready to get to work. Never mind the fact that each of us had to move our families and uproot our lives (thank God for our wives!)—we had a basketball program to put back together.

In past times when you took over a program that had great success, you were usually left with just a few holes to fill. On May 1st after the dust had settled, we had five players left: Tyler Patterson,

Sam Lecholat, Pat McMahon, Jed Miller, and Carter Ash. Robert Ford had entered the portal and was open to returning to MSU, but he needed to evaluate his options and build trust and a relationship with us. Our work was cut out for us, but our goals remained the same: the Big Sky Championship, and NCAA Tournament berths. There was no such thing as a “four-year plan.” We would try to construct a championship team as quickly as possible without skipping steps in the blueprint.

Fortunately, we had a lot to sell. Bobcat legend Danny Sprinkle had galvanized our community and shown what can be accomplished here. The support for Bobcat athletics by President Cruzado, Leon Costello and our athletic administration, as well as the groundswell of supporters in our community, gave us great confidence that we could continue to build off that momentum and maintain the standard of excellence that our Bobcat fans were accustomed to.

Over the next five weeks, a whirlwind of film review, phone calls, and recruiting visits would follow as we pieced our roster together before summer school began June 10th. Our core values of Trust, Love, Commitment, and Servanthood would guide our evaluation process, as well as the relationship building process with our new team. Ultimately, Robert Ford decided that he wanted to finish his career as a Bobcat. We added key transfers in Brian Goracke, Brandon Walker, Eddie Turner, John Olmstead, and Chika Nduka to the foundation of returners and got to work in June.

With a new coaching staff, playing style, and roster, we knew things would take time to piece together. We were playing catch up every day. As the summer ended, we



were all excited and encouraged by what we saw, and by our ability to surprise the naysayers.

As the fall pre-season unfolded, we began to see things come together. Robert Ford was emerging as our leader. Returners and newcomers began to get comfortable with one another, both on and off the court. Players who had yet to play their best college basketball were starting to see their talents emerge. All were gaining confidence and comfortability. It was time to compete.

After a season-opening victory, we traveled to Seattle University for our first Division I opponent—a homecoming of sorts for myself and many of our players from the Pacific Northwest. A hard-fought contest would come down to the wire, and a Robert Ford layup rimmed out as time expired. Although disappointing, we were encouraged due to the experience the Redhawks returned, and our relative newness. However, adversity began to rear its head, as point guard Eddie Turner broke his nose and would be out two



weeks. We next traveled to Cal Berkeley for a Pac-12 battle. Our attitude amidst adversity would be tested without our starting point guard on the road against a very talented Cal squad.

In my final pre-game comments at Cal, I highlighted the experience we had in our locker room as Bobcats versus Cal's newly minted roster. I emphasized the reasons our returners had stayed, the expectations that had brought our newcomers to MSU, and the togetherness that we would play with versus the individualistic nature of their make-up. Sure to form, that's how the game played out. The Bobcats were everywhere, scrapping, fighting, sharing the basketball. Brandon Walker exploded for 26 points against a former WAC defensive player of the year. Our returners played with confidence and determination, and we earned a signature victory, my first versus a Division I opponent, and a Pac-12 one at

that. But it would come at a cost: Pat McMahon, who had emerged as a key piece to our puzzle, had re-broken his foot. We had now lost one of our most versatile players for the season. There was only one response: "Attitude."

The weeks and months to follow were a roller coaster and a test of our character, and our attitude. A humbling loss one week would be followed by an encouraging win the next. A last-second loss to Green Bay was followed by a hard-fought victory versus UC-Riverside. A late 14-point lead versus eventual NCAA Tourney team Long Beach State evaporated in a loss at home, only to be followed by an electrifying buzzer beater by Brian Goracke versus Southern Utah. One step forward, one step back, but the process remained: come to work, get better, focus on March.

Early Big Sky results were promising; a 5-2 start and a signature victory over

Big Sky preseason favorite Eastern Washington provided excitement that we were indeed "ahead of schedule." It would be followed by a four-game losing streak. Growing pains.

Amidst the roller coaster, my drive to work each day happened to follow construction sites where new office buildings, homes, apartment buildings, and hotels were going up. It served as an analogy for me and our team. Follow the blueprint. Lay the foundation. Don't skip steps. Show up early, leave late. If you build it right, it will last forever.

The one thing that never wavered, by players, coaches, administration, and yes – the fans, was "attitude." Following that fourth loss in a row, we returned to the Brick in mid-February for a home game versus Portland State to find over 4,000 Bobcat faithful there to cheer us on. It was galvanizing. Our last road trip to Idaho and Eastern Washington served as a coming out party for John Olmstead, which was cemented on senior night in an impressive victory over Weber State on ESPN. It was now March, and the Bobcats were ready.

As we traveled to Boise for the Big Sky Tournament, it was time. Time for everyone to play well at the same time. The three days we'd been building towards. Time to play our best basketball of the season, and we knew our best was good enough.

A 66-point second-half explosion versus Weber State in the quarterfinals ended the Wildcats' season for the third year in a row. We followed that with a tough victory over scrappy Sacramento State, victors over the #1 seeded Eastern Washington. All of which set up a matchup for the ages: Cat-Griz Round 3,

for the Big Sky Championship and NCAA Tournament berth.

A back and forth first half led to a six-point half-time deficit. We found ourselves down 11 at the under 16-minute media timeout. We reminded them that the building was done. It was time to live and thrive in what we had built. There was only one word to say as we left the huddle: "Attitude."

A forty-one to nine Bobcat run would follow. Griz turnovers, fastbreak layups, clutch three-point shooting, and that scrappy Bobcat attitude were all on display. It was an avalanche.

The best was not "yet to come" as we had been saying all year—it was indeed here. The 2023-2024 Montana State Bobcats were

Big Sky Champions and headed back to the NCAA Tournament for the third year in a row!

As I reflect back on year one as the leader of our Bobcat basketball family, I couldn't be prouder of the journey we went on. Seeds were planted, roots took form, and we are indeed in the midst of a Golden era of Bobcat basketball. After a year of following our blueprint, the foundation is strong, and our house is on solid ground. It is no longer just a house; this is home. And I'd like to invite you to be a part of it. We are about to embark on a quest to accomplish history—four straight Big Sky Championships and NCAA Tournament appearances, and we need YOU. Buy your tickets now; let's make the Brick the most raucous environment in the Big Sky!



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BRIAN GORACKE

THE WORLD IS HIS OYSTER



BY PAUL BURNS

“The best for this program is definitely yet to come.”

~ MATT LOGIE

In Brian Goracke’s ever-expanding world, we’re just along for the ride. If we attach ourselves to his hip, we might go places, which is what he’s expecting of his life. A senior on Montana State’s men’s basketball team, Goracke has already been places, although in today’s world of name, image and likeness, he hasn’t seen as much as, say, former Bobcats RaeQuan Battle or Great Osobor. Unlike basketball players who once played for the Blue and Gold before chasing the money that NIL promises, Goracke’s world consists of his hometown in central Oregon, Point Loma University in San Diego, and now, MSU.

Goracke didn’t chase NIL money to Bozeman; instead, he chased Matt Logie, who coached at Point Loma before he chased a higher paycheck by agreeing to follow in the footsteps of ex-Bobcat coach Danny Sprinkle back in the spring of 2023. Logie saw that Sprinkle emptied out the cupboard, so he enlisted

Goracke to join him up north.

As much as Bobcat fans lament Sprinkle's exit, the fact remains that if he hadn't left, Logie and then Goracke wouldn't have arrived. "It wasn't in my plans at first," the 6 foot 6 Goracke says. "Coach Logie presented me with the opportunity to come with him and I thought it was the right move for me in my goals for basketball." The pair exceeded everyone's expectations by peaking near the end of last season and carrying their hot hands to the Big Sky Conference tournament championship, and then to the NCAA Tournament. Who saw that coming?

"We had some ups and downs in the season," Goracke said before the Bobcats' season ended with a loss to Grambling

State in the Tournament. "This group really rallied together and bounced back."

You never heard so much praise for a team with a losing record. Yes, the Bobcats finished 17-18, but the sweet-shooting guard, along with the now-legendary Robert Ford and John Olmsted, were the prize that kept on surprising.

With Ford and Olmsted exhausting their eligibility, the burden of a fourth consecutive NCAA Tournament berth next March falls squarely on the broad shoulders of Goracke and Brandon Walker, two workhorses from last season. Goracke was the second leading scorer (13.5 points per game) and rebounder (4.3 per game) last season, trailing only Ford



in both statistics. "The best for this program is definitely yet to come," Logie said after the Grambling game. "Now that we have a core group of guys that have a year under their belt (playing) with a new

An advertisement for Frontline Ag Solutions. The background is a lush green golf course at sunset. In the foreground, several pieces of John Deere equipment are displayed: a utility vehicle on the left, a tractor with a front loader in the center, a smaller tractor with a front loader on the right, and a riding mower in the foreground. The text "GO BOBCATS!" is written in large, bold, blue letters at the top left. Below it, the text "WE'RE ON THE FRONTLINE FOR ALL YOUR EQUIPMENT NEEDS" is written in white, serif font. The John Deere logo is in the bottom left corner.



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design and a new system, I think we have a tremendous opportunity to continue to get back (to the NCAA Tournament) in the future.”

And while Goracke’s world has stopped spinning for the moment, the world remains his oyster. He will graduate this December and take a smattering of classes in the spring to maintain his eligibility, but he’s already looking for his next opportunity—not just down the road, but across broad stretches of the globe. Some of his former Point Loma teammates, who also played for Logie, are playing for pay in Europe, a location Goracke hopes basketball takes him

after the upcoming season. “Any professional opportunity that is a good fit and seems reasonable I would explore, for sure.”

To paraphrase Jim Morrison, Goracke wants the world, just not right now. But he’ll get it if he has his way. After all, as a fifth grader living on the family’s rye grass farm outside of Monroe in the heart of Oregon’s Willamette Valley, he gave himself a goal: make it to the NCAA Tournament. He’s done it once and sees no reason why he and the Bobcats shouldn’t do it again, now that he and Logie have survived the transition from Division II Point Loma to Division I MSU.

“I expected to have success here,” Goracke says. “Division I players are better, but for me and the position I play and the size I have and the athleticism I have, I felt my game was going to translate well, and I feel like it has. I’ve had some good moments and sometimes I’ve struggled, but that’s all part of the process: try to keep the end goal in mind, stay true to the work you’re doing, and believe in yourself.”

What will never be known is whether Goracke could have played Division I right out of Monroe High. He entertained offers from Seattle, Missouri-Kansas City and the Navy, but ultimately landed in sunny and warm San Diego. “Passing up the Navy was tough,” he says, thinking back to his teenage self. “It was an intimidating thing to look at.” Had he gone to Annapolis, he probably would have gone to a military prep school first. Then, in exchange for a free education, and unless you’re a future NBA Hall-of-Famer like David Robinson, you’re going to spend five more years after you graduate serving your country.

Although he would certainly have seen the world, probably on board a large ship, “I was






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sitting there at 17 years old thinking the next 10 years of my life could be totally different than what I thought it was going to be,” he says. “I have a lot of respect for those guys, but it just wasn’t for me.”

What is for him, he says, is working in finance, particularly with college athletes. The NIL system has dumped mountains of money into the wallets of some very young and impressionable students, many of whom have never experienced the good life before. But if the money is mishandled, the young men and women could end up being no better off than they were when they entered college. This is where Goracke sees himself: offering financial guidance to a large swath of the population that is young and suddenly relatively well off. “It’s

a resource I haven’t seen, and I think there’s a need for it,” says the future business accountant. “If I could facilitate that for student athletes, I’d like that.”

It’s pretty safe to assume that a former college superstar like Caitlin Clark and her untold riches had someone guiding her through the perils of being rich and famous. But what about that very good player from a small college in Montana, like Goracke himself? He’s not getting rich off NIL, but he gets a few rewards for working with Roost Fried Chicken and Schnee’s in Bozeman.

“There are some players in college athletics that are making a lot, a lot of money. I’d like to help them manage that,” he says. “There are a lot of young people who make smart decisions with their money, but there are also those who don’t know what the best move is, so if I can be a hand in helping them, I’d like to.”

It’s a little ironic that athletes getting their education paid for are also making money for being, well, athletes. Take Goracke and his NILs, for instance. “The money is nice to have, but it’s not a necessity for me. If I have what I need and I can cover my costs and have a few extra

dollars to have a good time with my friends, I’m perfectly happy with that. I’d be open to more deals, but with the lifestyle I’m living now, I don’t need a lot of money. Most of that money would go toward my future.”

He lives a comfortable life, and he’s just barely of drinking age. It’s easy to look ahead at the 40-year-old Goracke and see someone still living a comfortable life, but with a few more guilty pleasures, because he’ll be able to afford them. He set himself up for financial success as a 19-year old when he opened a Roth IRA, which, like most things associated with the recent stock market, has grown in value. “My parents have been good resources, connecting me with reliable sources and trustworthy people who can advise me with what to do with my money,” he humbly says.

Goracke is worldly enough to know that none of this is set in stone. “You like to have a plan, but I’ve always been told that you tell God your plan and he’ll laugh right back at you. You never know exactly what you’re going to be doing.” Which is true enough, but it doesn’t take away from knowing that the world is Goracke’s oyster; it’s up to others to ride along.



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Fueled By Competitive Fire, Limardo Lights Up The Court

To put on the uniform and go out and compete is the best feeling.

BY CYNTHIA LOGAN

Watching Katelyn Limardo's long, lithe limbs in action, you can see why she's a standout on the MSU women's basketball team. She's fast, determined, and competitive, serving up some serious points on the scoreboard. You'd never guess that this super slender starter loves to eat—especially tacos and enchiladas, food she grew up on in Silver City, New Mexico. “I eat a lot,” she smiles. “I have such a fast metabolism that nothing really sticks, not even steak and potatoes with mushroom sauce.” She also loves seafood, huckleberry jam, and “any type of homemade bread. Bin (Coach Tricia Binford) calls me Gumby, since I can go between any crevice,” she



says. “It’s just body type; my parents were both that way.”

Katelyn Jean, who shares her mother’s middle name, grew up as KJ. “My dad is Puerto Rican; my mom’s side is from Louisiana and Europe, so I have the best of both worlds,” she affirms. You can see her dad’s heritage in KJ’s large brown eyes; her luxurious hair, usually pulled into a ponytail or braided by a teammate for practice and games, today hangs loose and heavy. She pulls some of it aside to show the curliness underneath, conferred by her mother, who played D2 basketball at Adams State in Colorado. Her mom was a coach, so Katelyn was aiming a ball at a kid-sized hoop as soon as she

could walk. “At age six or seven, I was in a pee wee league,” she says. “I also played some volleyball, but it was not for me; I’m not built for standing and jumping straight up. With basketball, I get a better workout, and I can contribute more.”

A devout Christian, KJ’s faith and family sustained her during the weeks following a serious injury during the first Cat-Griz game of the season in Missoula back in January. Having been slammed to the ground by a deliberate Griz foul, Limardo waited 30 minutes in a neck brace before being carried off the court on a stretcher. She experienced whiplash during the incident, and developed a concussion a few days afterward. “It was pretty scary, pretty painful, and kind of traumatic,” she says. “I didn’t expect to see that, and thought it could be





a game-changer, for good or bad. Looking back, I'm almost glad it happened, because I could feel the support of the community. I hope any little girls watching weren't too scared, but it's a lesson in 'how are you going to respond?' I know God has a plan."

Her parents, who were in the stands when the accident occurred, stayed to help, since Katelyn couldn't brush her hair or get a shirt over her head. "I knew they'd be freaking out if they were at home," she says. Having strained a muscle from her ear to her mid-back, she chose physical therapy and dry needling to help relax the muscle, and also saw a Salt Lake City chiropractor who works with NFL players. "After the initial hurdle, I feel like I'm back to where I was," she reports.

There was plenty of buzz around Limardo's condition and recovery, but she didn't share updates on social channels. "I didn't post about this; I wanted to keep it private," she says. "I was kind of traumatized, and in pain (some of which was emotional). There were people who came on social and said I was faking it. When you're a player putting your heart on the line, people are gonna come at you for it."

Majoring in community health with a minor in coaching, KJ is taking her 5th year of eligibility due to Covid, so she'll play one more season, after which she plans to work in public health / public administration, or attend PTA (Physical Therapist Assistant) school. "Or," she muses, "I might want to coach at the collegiate level. I love being around my age group; I can see potential in people and want to bring out the



“I just love the atmosphere; I love our community, and there is so much energy to our games.”

best in them.” She is working with Bozeman’s Cancer Support Community as part of an internship, helping with program development and grant writing. “I do a lot of research on my own,” she says. “I love learning about the body, about how everything is connected, and how to fuel your body.”

Asked about pre-game rituals, KJ nods. “Some of us need to eat a snack or put deodorant on... usually we have a little prayer (which she leads), then [Assistant Coach] Devin Perez does a sort of pep hype to get our blood going before we take the court.” The loud ‘basketball buzzer’ doesn’t bother her a bit. “I just love the atmosphere; I love our community, and there is so much energy to our

games. Our video team and Dobo (Director of Basketball Operations), Daniel Salle, are calling the games. I love hearing, ‘Limardo for three.’ Daniel brings so much to the table, and makes the game so much fun. He can be a little jokester.”

Winning the whole Big Sky tournament her sophomore year was an exciting moment. “We came together, and it was unique to experience that championship, feeling all the love and support,” says KJ. “So many fans came for that tournament. To put on the uniform and go out and compete is the best feeling.” And compete she does: her Junior year, Limardo made seven-of-nine shots from a three-point range, just one shy of the Bobcat

school record, and ended the season shooting 38.8% from long distance, which was best on the squad. She was named MSU Defensive Player of the Year, and was also an All-Big Sky Conference Academic pick.

Regarding Catilin Clark’s stunning stats, Limardo comments; “It starts with people wanting to go to games. Having Catilin, Paige Bueckers, Angel Reese and others with so much talent and media attention bring out the fact that women can ball too. It’s nice they’ve shared their platforms and can inspire young kids. Like Iowa and LSU, we try to do that here as best we can.” KJ trains a couple of 6-8th grade girls on a club team every week. “I put them through a workout; I encourage and inspire them,” she says. “I was once in their shoes and didn’t have anyone to look up to. I didn’t have that when I grew up.”

“KJ is a great person, and someone I truly look up to,” says teammate



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Brooke Berry. “We are all so grateful she decided to take her fifth year. Having her length on defense, her ability to shoot 3’s, and her ability to finish at the rim make it easy to be her teammate. Her kindness, ability to listen, and spiritual leadership make it easy to be her friend.” For her part, KJ says; “I wanted to stay for

my fifth year because I’ve never found a staff like this one. Bin trusts me; they [all her coaches] are reliable, and they listen. She won’t push us too far... I love them for how much they trust, encourage and support me.”

And, though she doesn’t really care about clothes (“I’m good with

throwing on a sweatshirt and leggings”), she appreciates style. “I love when the coaches dress up,” she says, casually waving to someone passing by. Tipped with white nail polish, her slender fingers look almost like bird wings. “It gets me going before games; I’m ready to play for them... even [at a less formal game] in their Polos, they still looked really good.”

When she’s not on the court or in the weight room, you’ll find KJ boating, hiking—anything outside; “I love the sun; I love to tan,” she says, adding that “moving to Montana was a very big adjustment; we get about two inches of rain down south three times a year, and maybe some frost on the windshield. I’ve adjusted quite well with a four wheel drive vehicle.” Nevertheless, she goes back home for a couple of weeks each summer, visiting her parents, her sister, and their Blue Heeler, Chili. And this year, she’ll be heading to Spokane to marry Noah Martin, a former high jump medalist for MSU. Besides their faith, the two share a fierce love of competition.

“I hate losing; ever since I was little, I was just super competitive, even just playing board games with my family,” relates KJ. Yet, she takes the loss (56-39) to Eastern Washington during the Big Sky Conference Tournament semifinal in Boise, Idaho in stride, noting that the team was limited all season by having just 5-6 players. “We were exhausted, and were very resilient given the obstacles we were handed. I’m proud of what we put out,” she says.

She should be proud; KJ Limardo is doing great things, on and off the court. She’s made her parents proud, not to mention Montana State Women’s Basketball.



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Bobcat Hockey Led by Regional Coach of the Year

“The support from the community is tremendous. That includes the hockey community, the MSU community and beyond.” ~ DAVE WEAVER



BY DR. SHANE DOYLE

Following the 2023-24 season with a record of 34-3, it's safe to say that MSU Bobcat Hockey has arrived as one of the premiere college hockey league teams in the nation. The Bobcats' remarkable season started off with an eighteen game winning

streak, and they hardly looked back, finishing as the top seed in the region, earning an automatic bid in the American Collegiate Hockey Association's Division 2 national tournament.

Although the Bobcats fell just short of their stated goal of a national championship, they won more games this season

than ever before, and they achieved some significant accolades along the way. During one three-day, three-game stretch in January, the Bobcats knocked off the top-ranked team in the nation twice and added a victory over Maryville University to complete the triple play. According to team captain Rhys Phelps, that weekend

gave the team the confidence they needed to set their sights on a championship and continue their path upwards.

According to head coach Dave Weaver, who also wears the hat of director of the Bozeman Amateur Hockey Association, the Bobcats' success on the ice this year (and over the past three seasons) is tied to a combination of outstanding community support, a solid coaching staff, and a tight-knit group of talented and skilled players. After garnering the National Coach of the Year award in 2022-23, Weaver captured the Regional Coach of the Year award for the second year in a row.

Individually, three players made the all-west team this season, including team captain Rhys Phelps, First Team defense, Hayden Klem, First Team defense and Second Team All-American, and Jorgen Johnson, First Team Goaltender. These high-achieving players bring a unique dedication to the MSU-Bobcat community, because they could no doubt choose to play for fully sponsored collegiate programs elsewhere, but instead they stay and compete for a team that may lack money, but radiates with pride and love for the game.

The team practices and plays their games at the local Gallatin Valley Ice rink, and the roster of players is drawn from throughout the nation, each of them choosing MSU-Bozeman because of the rising trajectory of the team and the enviable support it receives from a top-notch coaching staff and a supportive local community.

Unlike other officially sponsored sports, including Rodeo, the Bobcat Hockey club is a student-

run nonprofit organization that operates through player dues and fundraising. Ticket sales, sponsors, and grants from MSU also contribute to the organization's operational costs. Ice hockey is an expensive sport in general, and those costs skyrocket in the west, where



teams play over 25 games per year, and must travel many hours by bus to even the closest away games. Still, the love of the game and of wearing the Bobcat blue and gold keeps amazingly talented players here.

Thanks to some hard work and dedication from everyone in the organization and a big wave of support from the Gallatin Valley community, the Bobcats have been able to successfully travel to the tournament each year, and

each year they get a little closer to winning it. "The support from the community is tremendous. That includes the hockey community, the MSU community and beyond," says Weaver.

Under the leadership of the Coach of the Year, the Bobcat hockey team has steadily advanced in their growth and in their success, with the creation of a Division 3 team during the 2021-2022 season and swiftly ranking in the top 20 in the country in the ACHA rankings. One thing that's clear is that the players are extremely dedicated student-athletes who strive for excellence, and settle for nothing less than their very best in all aspects. In fact, during the last academic year, the team combined to log over 450 volunteer service hours, visiting and inspiring local public-school students to give their best as students, athletes, and most importantly, civic-minded community members who bring people together. At midseason rankings this year, the team was labeled as the number one team in the nation and is a heavy favorite to bring the National Title back to Bozeman, marking incredible advancement for all of Montana hockey—collegiate and amateur.





Four Bobcats. Four Laps. BY NOAH SYVERSON

ONE BIG WIN

"Montana ran a really good race; they were pretty close, but winning that was such a great feeling." - JETT GRUNDY



There are few events in sports as exciting as the 4x400 meter relay. In a discipline dominated by individual performances, the relay is the rare competition that relies on complete team execution. Four athletes traveling four laps around the track as fast as they possibly can, carrying one aluminum baton that is just under 12 inches in length. One misstep, one faulty baton exchange, or one slip-up and the entire operation comes crashing down. There's a reason the race is always the final event of any track meet—the stakes are high, and with every other event finished, the participating teams and their fans provide the energy and volume to spur their athletes on.

That energy and drama helped create the stage for perhaps the greatest race in the history of Montana State track and field this past spring, which came at the conclusion of an unforgettable 2024 Big Sky Outdoor Track & Field Championships hosted by MSU at Bobcat Track & Field Complex in May. Following four days of competition, everything on the men's side came down to one point in the team standings. Trailing 181-176 to 11th-ranked Northern Arizona heading into the final event, Montana State needed some magic. On their home track, the Bobcats got that magic in the form of a school record-breaking 4x400 meter relay team.

In one of the all-time great Montana State moments, the Bobcats secured a breathtaking men's team title at the Championships, their first since 2005. The men's 4x400 meter relay team of Michael Swan Jr., Stryder Todd-Fields, Janis Pohl, and Jett Grundy put everything together to finish with an altitude-converted mark of 3:08.42 in

the race, shattering the school record by three seconds. Grundy's heroic dash down the home straightaway in front of a raucous crowd edged out Montana's anchor leg, giving the Cats' relay squad the gold medal and ten points, while Northern Arizona finished in fifth, recording four points. Final total? Montana State 186, Northern Arizona 185.

The win secured the Bobcats' first championship since 2005, and just their second-ever in the 60-year history of the Big Sky. It also broke up a Lumberjack dynasty that had won three titles in a row, nine of the last 11, and 12 of the last 16 in the conference. "It is pretty special," says Lyle Weese, Dale Kennedy Director of Track and Field. "A conference championship would mean a lot in a lot of areas, but here it just means more because of the support we have. It definitely alleviated a number of years of frustration. (NAU is) such a great team—they are one of the best track programs in the country, so to beat them you have to become one of the better track programs in the country. We've spent years building up and building up, and we didn't know if this would be the year, but we knew we were getting stronger and that we were going to make a run at it."

The 186-185 margin was the closest in the history of the championship with such a high point-total. Regardless of the result of the final race, the runner-up was going to break the Big Sky record for most points by a second-place team in conference history. Weber State finished a distant third with 91 points.

"There was a point at first, when we were five points back going into the 4x400, when I thought this was going to be tough," says Weese. "But then I considered

all the really good 4x400's in the conference this year, and I thought, Well, there's a chance, because there's a number of teams that have really, really good relay teams, I felt really good about our team, and when you get a bunch of really strong teams together you never know how it's going to shake out. Most years, NAU is in the top three for sure in the four-by-four, but they still ran a really quality time and placed fifth, so some of it shows the strength of the conference."

Montana State freshman sprinter Jett Grundy had heard for months about his team's chase of Northern Arizona for the top of the mountain in Big Sky Conference track and field, but he didn't really feel it until he was about to take the baton for the anchor leg of Saturday's 4x400 meter relay, which would decide the men's conference championship. "It was unreal," says the Australian. "Just before I got my handoff, I saw how far NAU was behind and I thought, 'We really have a chance.' Everyone



being so hyped. It was great."

With his team gathered near the point of the handoff and the grandstands and fence line completely packed, Grundy began his final leg to quite a din. In order for a Bobcat championship, MSU not only needed to win the 4x400, but needed NAU to finish fifth or lower. The Lumberjacks began the anchor leg in sixth. "Honestly, the hype we've had to beat NAU this meet, that really motivated me, knowing we had a chance to do it," says Grundy. "As soon as I got the baton I was like, I'm not letting them catch me. Montana ran a really good race; they were pretty close, but winning that was such a great feeling."

Swan Jr., a sophomore from nearby Manhattan, Montana, who had grown up a huge Montana State fan (his father and uncle were among those who had competed for the track and field team in Blue and Gold) took to the starting blocks on his birthday and turned in a monster split to put the Cats in a commanding pole position after the first lap. "I really wanted to set the pace for MSU and get a really good lead and try to get them out there the best I could," says Swan. "The team title was on the line for sure, and I wanted to get the lead for them so bad and put them in the best position I possibly could. So that was my mindset heading into the 4x400. I believed in each and every one of them that they would get the job done. They're one heck of a team and I'm so blessed to be a part of their lives. They're amazing guys."

After fellow sophomore Stryder Todd-Fields took the baton and kept the Bobcats in front with a strong second lap, he passed it off to senior Janis Pohl, who was running in his first career 4x400 relay. Pohl, a native of Frankfurt, Germany, who had won



the Big Sky 400 meter hurdles title earlier in the day, found enough in the tank to deliver a huge lap and hand it off to the Big Sky 400-meter champion in the freshman, Grundy, who said afterwards that his teammates deserved all the credit for making sure he had the lead for the final lap of the race.

"Amazing job," recalls Grundy. "Mike firstly, he took it out and did exactly what he needed to do. Then it was Stryder, who ran a perfect, perfect race, he ran a really good split. I'm really proud of him. Then Janis, he's battling injury. He did really well in the hurdles, and he came today and did really well for the team. I just brought it home, probably had the easiest job."

As Grundy crossed the finish line to an ear-shattering roar, the entire Montana State track and field team stormed the track in wild pandemonium, hugging and jumping to start the championship celebration. "It was amazing competing in front of the home crowd, you've got my family up there, a bunch of Montana State alumni watching and cheering

us on," says Swan. "I couldn't ask for a better place to have the conference [championship] than Bozeman, Montana, with everyone cheering. It was loud, it was super loud, and I love it, love the atmosphere, love that everyone was here supporting us."

Weese, a Dillon native who was inducted into the Montana State Athletics Hall of Fame in 2014 after an All-American cross country and track and field career from 1999-2003, acknowledged that the thrilling end to the meet with one final race for all the marbles was made even more storybook by the fact it took place on the Cats' home track.

"We have such great support from the community, and for our student athletes to have that experience of competing for a conference championship in front of their home crowd and getting such great support was pretty special," says Weese. "I know it's something they won't forget."

Four Bobcats. Four laps. And now, one unforgettable place in Montana State track and field history.



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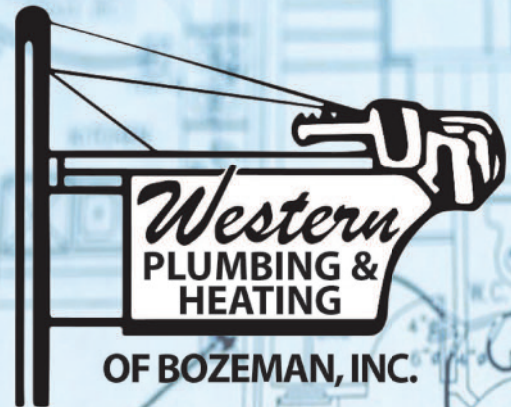
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2024 MSU BOBCAT FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME	LOCATION	TV STATION	CONFERENCE	PROMOTION
24 Aug	University of New Mexico	2:00 p.m. MST	Albuquerque, N.M.	FS1/ESPN+	FBS Non-Conference	
31 Aug	Utah Tech	8:00 p.m. MST	St George, UT	ESPN+	FCS Non-Conference	
07 SEPT	U OF MAINE	6:00 p.m. MST	BOZEMAN, MT	ESPN+	FCS Non-Conference	GOLD RUSH
21 SEPT	U OF MERCYHURST	1:00 p.m. MST	BOZEMAN, MT	ESPN+	FCS Non-Conference	Pack the Place in PINK
28 SEPT *	Idaho State	TBD	Pocatello, ID	ESPN+	Big Sky	
05 Oct *	NORTHERN COLORADO	TBD	BOZEMAN, MT	ESPN+	BIG SKY	HOMECOMING
12 Oct *	UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO	1:00 p.m. MST	BOZEMAN, MT	ESPNU, ESPN+	Big Sky	Parent/Family Weekend
19 Oct *	Portland State U	TBD	Portland, OR	ESPN+	BIG SKY	
02 Nov *	E. Washington Uni	TBD	Cheney, WA	ESPN+	Big Sky	
09 Nov *	SACRAMENTO STATE	1:00 p.m. MST	BOZEMAN, MT	ESPN+	Big Sky	Military/Ag Appreciation
16 Nov *	UC Davis	TBD	Davis, CA	ESPN+	BIG SKY	
23 Nov *	University of Montana	1:00 p.m. MST	BOZEMAN MT	ESPN+	Big Sky	SR. DAY

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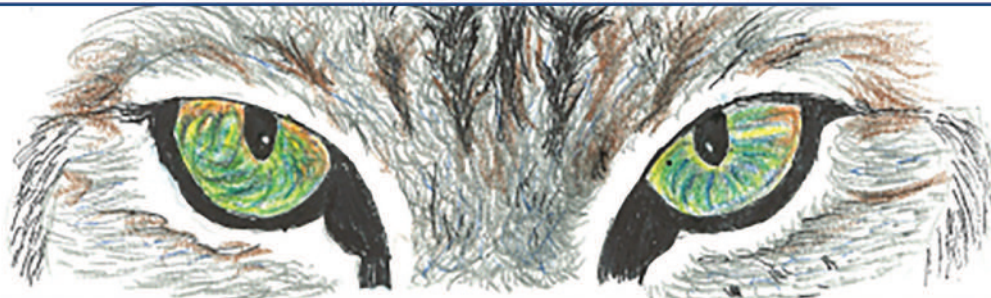
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Contributors



Felix A. Marquez has had a passion for photography since childhood. Over the past 30 years he has focused his camera on such prominent figures as Mother Teresa, U.S. Presidents and Senators, and music greats Andrea Bocelli, Aretha Franklin, Michael Jackson and Quincy Jones, among others. His love of sports has led to commissions to photograph numerous Olympic games. His images of golf and tennis legends have sold worldwide and have appeared in S.I. as well as in National Geographic magazine. He is pleased to have introduced and published *The Bobcat Football Magazine Plus*.



Cynthia Logan is co-founder of the *Bobcat Football Magazine Plus*. A freelance writer and editor for over three decades, her feature articles have appeared in *Cowboys and Indians*, *Montana Quarterly*, *The Montecito Journal*, *Home*, *Big Sky Journal*, *Edible Bozeman*, *Western Home Journal*, *Distinctly Montana*, *Outside Bozeman* and *Atlantis Rising*, among other publications.



Paul Burns has been a Bozeman resident for over 35 years. He was formerly an award-winning writer and columnist for the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* and currently works as a freelancer, covering events and topics in southwest Montana for out-of-town publications.



Dr. Shayne Doyle, Apsáalooke, is a cultural consultant based in Bozeman. Shane is an educator and designs curriculum for groups like the Montana Office of Public Instruction, the National Park Service, and the Smithsonian. Dr. Doyle is also an environmental advocate, research scientist, and film and performance art producer and performer. He is currently the Lead Coordinator for the Montana Warrior Spirit Curriculum Design Project.



Matt Logie enters his second season as head coach of Montana State men's basketball in 2024-2025. Logie is currently eighth among all active men's college basketball coaches in winning percentage (.794) and has taken teams to the NCAA Tournament in 12 of 13 seasons. Matt and his wife Julia have two children, Addy and Luke.



Vanessa McMurray lives north of Manhattan with her husband, Kyle. She enjoys writing, gardening, cooking and entertaining friends and family.



A Redshirt member of BobcatNation.com, **John Nelson** is known as UPSMAN. A third-generation MSU Alum (class of 1988) John worked at UPS Operations for a number of years. He is now enjoying retirement.



Benjamin Seymour, a former Defensive End for Montana State, is the eldest of three brothers. Born in Omaha, Nebraska, he grew up in Valencia, California, where he discovered his love for football. He fulfilled his dream of becoming a collegiate football player through consistency, dedication, and lots of hard work.



Noah Syverson, a native of Rome, Georgia, enters his second year as assistant director of digital and media relations in the Montana State athletic department, working as the primary media contact for Bobcat men's basketball, track and field, cross country, and golf, while assisting with football.



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